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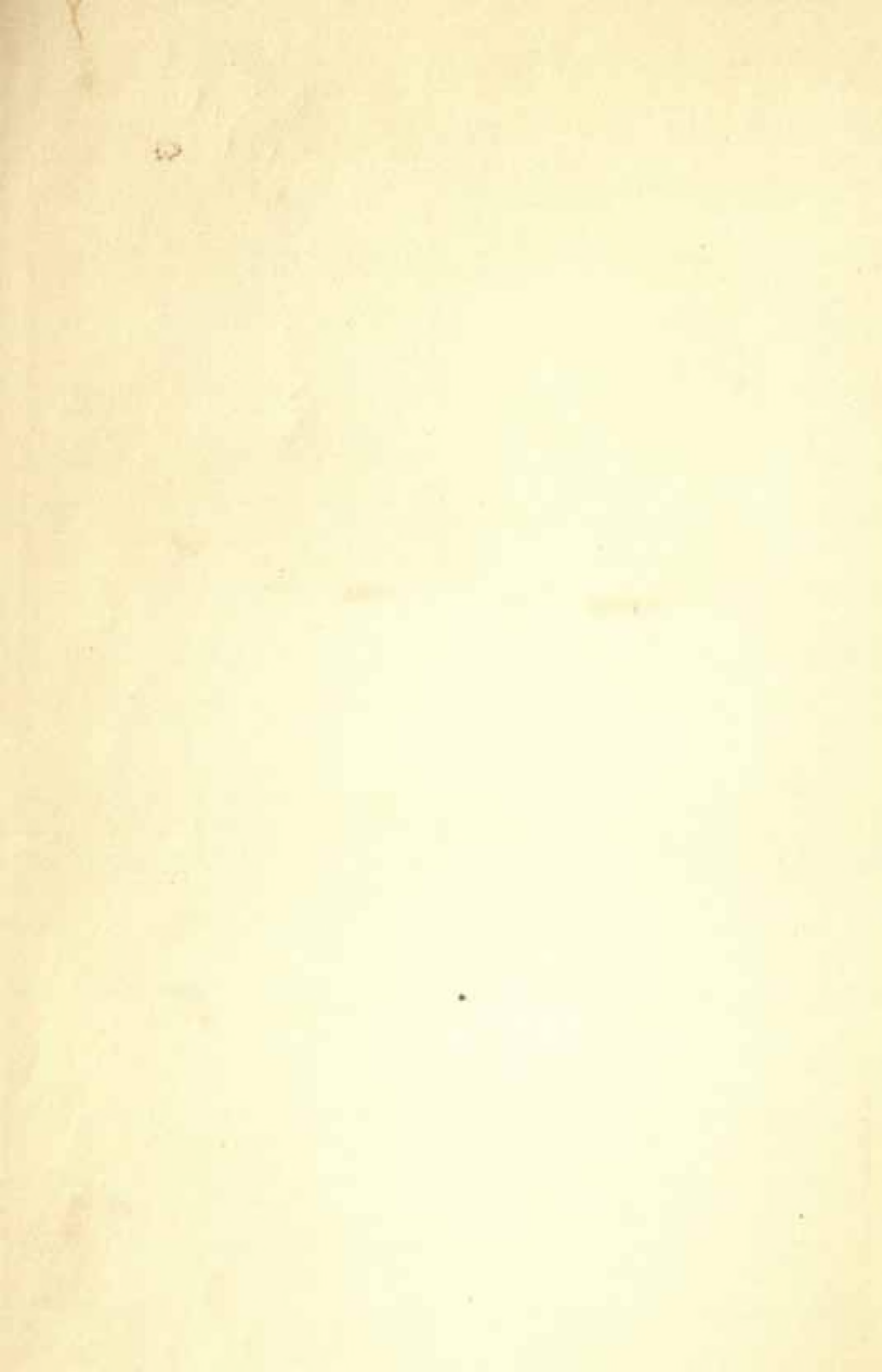
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*Stephen Fuchs*  
*The Children of Hari*

**Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik**

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# THE CHILDREN OF HARI

A STUDY OF THE NIMAR BALAHIS  
IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES OF INDIA

BY

STEPHEN FUCHS

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## Foreword

India's 'untouchables' — officially described as depressed classes or scheduled castes — have hitherto received scant attention from anthropologists and the present work by Father STEPHEN FUCHS has the distinction of being one of the few full-dress accounts of castes belonging to the lowest stratum of Indian society. True, there is Briggs' book on the Chamars and Aiyappan's recent study of the Nayadis of Malabar, but compared to the countless works on Indian history, philosophy and art, which deal almost exclusively with the cultural manifestations of the higher castes, the literature concerned with the sixty million depressed classes is of very slim volume. What is the reason for this apparent neglect of about one sixth of the country's population by the students of Indian society? Both sociology and anthropology are of comparatively recent growth on Indian soil, and while sociologists have tended to concentrate on urban and industrial problems, anthropologists have been engrossed in the study of India's numerous aboriginal tribes. The rapid transformation of many aboriginal cultures under the impact of more advanced civilizations has made field-research among these tribes a matter of such urgency that the few anthropologists working in India can hardly be blamed for their reluctance to embark on the study of any of the untouchable communities. Nor can it be denied that in most parts of India the culture of the depressed classes appears at first sight a somewhat impoverished variant of the civilization of the local caste-Hindus lacking the originality of many of the tribal cultures. Finally there are certain practical difficulties which stand in the way of field-work among any of the depressed castes. Prejudice on the part of caste society tends to hamper the investigator in his approach to the untouchables and powerful vested interests are likely to sabotage an impartial inquiry into the economic exploitation and social oppression of the untouchables by the higher castes. Similar difficulties may sometimes impede anthropological work even among aboriginals<sup>1)</sup>, but as the latter live usually in a closed tribal society such extraneous influences are more easily overcome.

STEPHEN FUCHS' success in gaining an insight into the economic, social and religious life of the Balahis of the Central Provinces

<sup>1)</sup> Cf. my *The Reddis of the Bison Hills*, London 1945, pp. 6—8.

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should therefore be rated all the higher, and those with experience of rural Indian society will appreciate the hard and patient work which has gone into the making of this book. His were few of the joys of the heart and the eye which make field-work among such people as Nagas or Bastar Gonds an inspiring and elating adventure, but tenacity of purpose, a high scholarly ideal and a genuine sympathy with the underdog has enabled him to discover below the drabness and poverty of Balahi life the substance of a complex culture as worthy of the anthropologist's attention as that of any tribal people.

Indeed the work of STEPHEN FUCHS is concrete proof of the potentialities of the anthropological approach, i. e. the combination of verbal inquiry with direct observation, for the study of Indian rural communities. The field for such investigation is enormous and virtually untouched, and it is to be hoped that anthropologists working in India will emulate the type of investigations which ROBERT REDFIELD, SOL TAX and other American scholars have carried out so successfully among the peasant-communities of Central America. In China the Yenching-Yunnan Station of Sociological Research and the West China Frontier Research Institute have advanced the anthropological study of rural societies and in India too there is ample justification to broaden the basis of anthropological research and to extend field-investigations to the peoples of the ordinary Indian villages.

STEPHEN FUCHS has refrained from discussing the origin of the untouchable castes in general, and it would indeed have been unwise to burden the descriptive account of a single caste with the attempt to unravel so involved a problem. Yet sooner or later the historical position of the depressed classes will have to be clarified. The theory that the untouchables are the descendants of an original population conquered by later invaders and subsequently reduced to the status of serfs and menials is no longer tenable, though in individual cases political conquest or economic domination may have relegated a tribal population to the rank of an untouchable caste. But we have only to compare the over-all socio-economic position of the aboriginal tribes and that of the depressed classes to realize the weakness of this theory, which incidentally is responsible for the designation Adi-Hindu ("original Hindu") used in political parlance as a euphemism for depressed classes.

If the untouchables were the remnants of a submerged autochthonous population one would expect them to differ radically in physical make-up from the dominant castes, while having affinities to those aboriginal populations which have retained their ethnic individuality. But anthropometric evidence does not support this view. Although in some areas the depressed classes stand racially

between the highest Hindu castes and the aboriginal forest tribes, on the whole the racial association between the untouchables and the local Hindu castes is much closer than that between untouchables and aboriginals. In the Telugu-speaking parts of the Deccan, for instance, the depressed castes of Madigas and Malas are of a physical type no less progressive than that prevailing among the local cultivating castes, whereas the aboriginal tribes of Chenchus, Konda Reddis and Koyas are unmistakably of more primitive type. Similarly the Doms of the United Provinces, who stand on the lowest rung of the racial ladder, resemble racially some of the highest castes. This has recently been emphasized by D. N. Majumdar in a discussion of the correlation between race and social status. "The 'Dravidian' theory" writes Majumdar, "places the Dom alongside the tribal groups but on anthropometric and serological evidence this is difficult to uphold. On the one hand the Dom approach the Kshatriya in stature, sitting height and other characters, on the other they show close relation with the Chamar ... Whatever be the cultural status of the Dom, their dissociation from the tribal groups ... is definitely established" \*). The physical similarities between the untouchables and the higher castes of the same locality suggest, if not common ancestry, at least an association sufficiently ancient to have led to a harmonization of types through miscegenation over a fairly extensive period of time.

The economic and occupational position of the depressed classes is equally irreconcilable with the hypothesis of their descent from an older autochthonous people conquered by the ancestors of the present caste-Hindus. Such a population would have consisted mainly of cultivators, and there is no apparent reason why their fate should have been different from that of such agricultural tribes as Gonds, Mundas or Santals in areas where the aboriginals are now dominated by more dynamic populations. But it is only in certain parts of Southern India that the untouchables are mainly agrestic serfs. Elsewhere they have no particularly close connection with the soil, but on the contrary are craftsmen such as leatherworkers and weavers or menials working as messengers, watchmen or sweepers. Indeed it is difficult to envisage the development of untouchability in a society of cultivators. In villages, where nearly everyone is engaged in agriculture, there is comparatively little difference in the standards of living of the wealthy and the poor, and even slaves usually share their masters' habitations and meals. None of the tasks performed in the pursuit of agriculture is likely to appear particularly distaste-

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\*) 'The Racial Basis of Indian Social Structure', *The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. II, 1949, p. 149.

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ful to a villager, and it is therefore unlikely that any one set of people would be shunned by other villagers on account of their occupation. In a town, however small, conditions are different. Here the wealthier citizens, engaged perhaps in trade, the organization of government and the management of larger estates easily attain a level of culture and sophistication which sets them apart from the ordinary manual labourer. The poorer classes, on the other hand, are likely to live in squalor such as is seldom found in a rural environment. Where their occupation, such as the dressing and tanning of hides, added to the unhygienic conditions of their quarters, the upper classes may well have felt a certain revulsion to close physical contact and this may have resulted in the banishment of people of such 'unclean' occupations to the outskirts of the settlements. In a society where personal cleanliness is largely identified with ritual purity and the idea of pollution is as highly developed as among the dominant Hindu castes, the 'unclean' occupations of certain menial classes would obviously have excluded them from participation in many ritual activities. They and their work would have seemed not only repugnant, but fraught with the danger of pollution, and they themselves may gradually have been treated as 'untouchable'. Where the growth of settlements necessitated the employment of scavengers — for whom even today there is no need in any of the smaller Indian villages — these 'untouchables' were the obvious recruits for such menial and unpleasant service. Once untouchability had developed in urban or semi-urban settlements its gradual spread to the villages was inevitable, for it is everywhere the towns which set the standard.

While everything points to an urban origin of untouchability, it is not yet possible to ascribe the growth of this social phenomenon to any definite period in Indian history. It would certainly be tempting to construe a link between the untouchable craftsmen of Dravidian India and an 'industrial' proletariat of the ancient Indus towns, whose ultimate break-up might even account for the dispersal of 'untouchables' throughout other parts of India, but such a hypothesis would be little more than speculation.

That certain aboriginal tribes, particularly in Southern India, have been reckoned among the depressed classes and, following the loss of their economic freedom, have sunk to the level of untouchables shall not be denied. But on the whole it is not the aboriginals standing outside the caste-system who suffer from the most severe social disabilities, but the depressed classes who for centuries have lived in closest association with caste-Hindus. Many aboriginals eat beef and follow other habits objectionable to Hindus without being treated as untouchable, whereas members of depressed classes cannot

gain admittance to Hindu society even though they may personally abandon such customs. Were the untouchables really the descendants of a conquered, aboriginal population, certainly their 'impurity' and low social status would be shared by those aboriginals least assimilated to Hindu civilization. But the contrary is true, and the aboriginal cultivator, be he Gond or Munda, looks down upon the untouchable in the same manner as does any caste-Hindu. Very rarely do we find aboriginals and members of depressed classes living side by side as cultivators of equal status, as one would expect them to do if the untouchables were the descendants of an old agricultural population subjected by the more advanced Hindu castes. Wherever untouchables do live in symbiosis with aboriginals they are considered new-comers of a low social status.

More factual material on the depressed classes than is available at present will have to be gathered before we can advance any comprehensive theory regarding the origin of the untouchable castes of India. STEPHEN FUCHS has made an excellent beginning with his monograph on the Balahis and we can only hope that his example will be followed by other students of Indian society. Not only socially and politically but also anthropologically the depressed classes constitute an All-India problem, and only a large number of intensive regional studies can bring us closer to a solution.

All those familiar with Indian village-life will agree with the author's realistic assessment of the Balahis' prospects. The position of the depressed classes cannot be changed by legislation and unless the basic problem of economic dependence and exploitation is solved, they have little chance of over-coming traditional social disabilities. Education may help in improving the status of individual members of the depressed classes, but only a change of attitude on the part of the dominant castes can lead to a gradual disappearance of untouchability and all the social discrimination which it involves. My own experience in the organization of social work among the depressed classes of Hyderabad State is not very encouraging. While schemes for the education and economic amelioration of aboriginals have met with surprising success, work for the depressed classes has never ceased to be a fight against heavy odds, partly on account of the untouchables' inability to cooperate with each other for their community's betterment, and partly on account of the opposition of the rural caste-Hindus. The note of warning struck by STEPHEN FUCHS on the last pages of the book should not be ignored. Unless Hindu society radically modifies its attitude towards the untouchables they will be tempted to join any political movement that aims at the disruption of the present social order. Today the great mass of the untouchables may be too uneducated and too helpless to constitute

a political force, but in the long run a class of sixty million people cannot be ignored. As yet few of them aspire to more than admittance to Hindu society on equal terms and to subsequent assimilation. But if baulked of this aim, they are likely to turn against a society which has condemned them to a rôle of permanent inferiority, and to support any revolutionary movement which promises to better their prospects.

The greatest bar to the progress of the untouchables in rural areas — conditions in the modern industrial towns are very different — is the prejudice on the part of the other communities. Such prejudice rooted in tradition can be overcome only by the understanding of customs and values other than those of one's own culture and it is by creating the basis of such understanding that anthropology can contribute to the promotion of tolerance between the communities. Books like STEPHEN FUCHS' *The Children of Hari* should exert a stimulating and constructive influence on contemporary social consciousness and thus help the cause of the people whose life and culture are described in their pages.

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University of London.  
July 1949.

## Preface

A number of anthropological studies of Indian aboriginal tribes have in recent years roused interest in the primitive tribes of the subcontinent both among scholars and the general public. But towards the more numerous and equally interesting untouchable and low castes of India there prevails still a good deal of indifference in anthropological circles. This is rather astonishing because it is just from these pre-Aryan races that the Hindu castes must in the course of centuries have assimilated many customs and usages which are today regarded as genuine Hindu traditions. For a sound understanding and true interpretation of Indian religion, culture, and history, a detailed and comprehensive study of the customs and traditions of all Indian castes, but in particular of the non-Aryan low castes, is an imperative need. The study of such castes will open new vistas and solve many problems and puzzles which so far have been the despair of Indologists.

A number of general surveys of Indian castes and tribes have been compiled under the auspices of the Governments of Provinces and States. While these surveys are admirable in their intention and are, as a whole, a veritable treasure-mine for anthropologists and other scholars, it cannot be denied that the time has come when these compilations must be reinforced by more detailed and exact studies of individual castes and tribes. For these encyclopedic descriptions have for the most part been written not by trained anthropologists, but by well-meaning, yet not always qualified, administrative officials. Anybody who reads what the authors of "The Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces" have written on, for instance, the Balahis, will endorse this criticism.

In the following pages is presented a study of an untouchable caste or more exactly a fragment of an important untouchable caste. War conditions have prevented me from visiting and studying the whole area where Balahis live, and I have therefore deliberately limited my study to the Balahis of the Nimar District of the Central Provinces among whom I spent over ten years. Speaking their language and living among them I was able to win their confidence. Soon after my arrival in the Nimar District I began to study the

mentality and beliefs, the customs and traditions, the ways and conditions of living, of the Balahis and I have kept up this study till this book was finished. This monograph therefore is an account which has taken years to complete during which time I was able to collect my material not only with the assistance of several native adepts in Balahi lore, but also by long and continuous observation of my own, in the most natural and casual manner.

My purpose has been from the beginning to give an impartial and straightforward presentation of facts without regard to preconceived theories; statements are based on facts just as I have seen and learned them at first hand. The scientific elaboration of my findings I leave to the experts.

Among my main informants in general matters of Balahi lore were, first of all, GOPAL DHAKSYA, KUSHIAL HANUMANTYA, and NARSING VOSALYA. GOPAL is one of the most intelligent and respected Balahis of the Nimar District, well versed in Balahi lore and very popular among his caste fellows of the whole district. KUSHIAL is a Balahi Bhat, a poet and singer, who wanders from village to village narrating the old traditions of the caste, and the history of the Balahi clans from the oldest times. He is in possession of a very old Balahi clan register in which the genealogies of a great number of Balahi families in the Nimar are recorded. NARSING is a Balahi Sadhu who from infancy has taken a special interest in the study and practice of the religious customs and traditions of his caste.

For valuable information on details which otherwise might have escaped my attention, I am indebted to Rev. CHARLES SCHMIDT S.V.D. and Rev. DAMASUS PLEY S.V.D. who for many years have worked as Catholic missionaries among the Balahis.

This book bears the title 'The Children of Hari' (i. e. of God), because the Balahis themselves claim to be descendants of Hari (see Creation Myth, p. 235). Moreover, the late Mahatma Gandhi, great champion for the cause of the Depressed Classes in India, liked to call them 'Harijan', which has the same meaning as 'Children of Hari'. The name 'The Children of Hari' which Gandhi meant to be a honorific title for the Depressed Classes in general applies therefore to the Balahis in a double sense.

I want to express my sincerest gratitude to His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, Rome, for a very generous subsidy, and also to the Director of Public Instruction of the Central Provinces, Nagpur, for considerable financial help, which greatly facilitated the publication of this book. I also thank Dr. C. VON FÜRER-HAEMENDORF, Reader in Anthropology in the University of London,

sometime Professor of Anthropology in the Osmania University and Adviser to H. E. H. the Nizam's Government for Tribes and Backward Classes, for his Foreword and for valuable criticism and suggestions, and Mrs. E. VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF and Rev. D. WALSH S.V.D. for their painstaking revision of the English text. Mr. SURENDRA NATH DUBE, Director of Land Records and Superintendent of Census Reports for Central India (1941), has helped me much with his advice and by procuring the enclosed maps and statistics. Most of the drawings were made by the adept hand of Sr. RADEGUNDIS PAUL S.Sp.S., Vienna, from photographs and under my supervision. Last not least I thank Prof. W. KOPPERS, of the University of Vienna, for admitting my book to appear in his distinguished series called „Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik“, and Dr. R. SCHMITZ, General Manager of the „Herold-Verlag“, Vienna, for taking this book under his generous protection.

STEPHEN FUCHS.

Vienna, Dec. 1st, 1949.

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## Part I — Introduction

### Chapter I

#### The Geographical and Historical Setting of the Nimar Balahis

##### (1) General Description of the Nimar District of the Central Provinces

The Nimar District is a part of the Nerbudda Division of the Central Provinces, situated between 21° 5' and 22° 25' N and 75° 57' and 77° 13' E. It covers a strip of mixed hill and plain country at the central portion of the Nerbudda valley and the Satpura plateau, and is bounded on the north by the Holkar State, on the west by the Holkar State and the Khandesh District of Bombay, on the south by Khandesh and the Amraoti and Akola Districts of Berar, and on the east by the Hoshangabad and Betul Districts of the Central Provinces.

The present District includes only a small portion, the easternmost, of the old province of Prant Nimar which before the Mogul invasion comprised the whole Nerbudda valley from the Ganjal river on the east to the Hiranphal on the west in both of which places the Vindhya and Satpura ranges run down to the river. On the other hand the southern or Burhanpur tahsil of the present Nimar District did not originally belong to Prant Nimar but to the pre-Mogul division of Talner which afterwards was called Khandesh by the Mohamedans.

The total area of the present District is 4273 square miles, and it is divided into three tahsils, Khandwa lying north-west, Harsud north-east and Burhanpur to the south of the district. It may be broadly described as comprising a portion of the Nerbudda valley in the north and a part of the Tapti valley in the south, divided by the Satpura range crossing the district from west to east. About 25 miles south of the Nerbudda a low range of foot-hills, commencing on the western border of the Khandwa tahsil, traverses the district diagonally until it abuts on the Nerbudda on the extreme north-east. The country lying between this southern range and the Nerbudda is broken and uneven and covered mostly with forest. South of it lies the most fertile area of the district, the valleys of the Abner and Sukta rivers. Both these rivers have an easterly course and are tributaries

of the Chhota Tawa which flows from south to north to join the Nerbudda. This part of the district is open and contains no forest or hill of any size, but the surface is undulating and small valleys with a central stream fringed with palms, Mahua and Mango trees alternate with broad ridges, some comparatively fertile, others bare and stony. Khandwa town is in the centre of the plain. To the south of this tract the main range of the Satpura crosses the district with a width of about eleven miles and a generally low elevation from which a few peaks, including that of Asirgarh, rise conspicuously. Practically the whole of the hills are covered by forests, and form a large belt occupying the north of Burhanpur tahsil. Between this range and another to the south, the Tapti river has forced a passage, and after passing through a cleft in the hills emerges into two open basins separated by the isolated hill of Samardeo. The upper of these is known as the Manjrod tract; below it in a small plain of deep diluvial deposit stands the town of Burhanpur. On the east of the district a considerable area has been added in 1896 from the Hoshangabad District and this forms the bulk of the new Harsud tahsil. This land is generally broken and uneven, and of poor fertility, the villages being interspersed with forest. To the south-east the large block known as the Kalibhit reserved forest is also included in the Nimar District<sup>1</sup>).

Most of the Nimar Balahis live in the fertile western and central area of the Nimar District, in the valleys of the Abner and Sukta rivers. Almost no Balahis are found in the Burhanpur tahsil, except a few Balahi families who have settled in Burhanpur town and in some villages near the town. In the villages of the eastern forest tracts single Balahi families or family groups are dispersed among the aboriginals. These Balahis belong mostly to the Mundi section of the caste and have not much contact with the Balahis of the plains. they live much like the aborigines among whom they have settled.

## (2) History of the Nimar District

According to local tradition a Sisodiya Rajput king, a mythical descendant of the god Rama, came from Oudh and reigned at Asirgarh several centuries before the Christian era. But the earliest historical record concerning the district is the Asirgarh seal which is of the Maukhari king Sarvavarman and contains the names of five kings, all ending in Varman. The seal is undated, but from other inscriptions the date of Ishanavarman, the father of Sarvavarman, is known to have been 550 A. D.

<sup>1</sup>) Cf. R. V. RUSSELL: Central Provinces District Gazetteers: Nimar District, vol. A, pp. 1—3. Allahabad 1908.





From 360 to 533 A. D. the whole of northern India was united under the great Gupta dynasty. The free tribes of Rajputana and Malwa were attached to the empire by bonds of subordinate alliance. About 495 A. D. the Gupta empire was overthrown by incursions of Hunas or Huns, and one of their kings, Toramana, established himself in Malwa some time before 500 A. D. His successor was deposed by a combination of Indian princes under the leadership of the king of Magadha, and Yasodharman, a raja of Central India. The Maukhari kings mentioned in the Asirgarh inscription may have been the successors of Yasodharman as their period was from 540 to 585 A. D.

After them Malwa passed to the Vardhana dynasty of Thaneshwar (in Ambala District) and Kanauj (Oudh). Nimar with the rest of Malwa was no doubt included in the territories of the Vardhana dynasty, to which the Maukhari kings may probably have succumbed. The Vardhana dynasty ended in 648 A. D. and it may then have passed to the Vakataka kings who probably ruled from the fifth to the eighth centuries. From the ninth to the twelfth centuries the north of the district was included in the Ponwar kingdom of Dhar, while Asirgarh and the surrounding country was held by a family of Rajputs known as Tak. They dominated the Nimar till the beginning of the 13th century, when they were superseded by chiefs of the Tomar clan, and afterwards by the Chauhan clan of Rajputs. About this time Northern Nimar came into the possession of a raja of the Bhilala tribe, and his descendants are still to be found in the chiefs of Bhamgarh, Mandhata and Seloni.

Malwa was first subdued by the Mohammedans in 1310 and in 1387, on the collapse of the empire (in the reign of Muhammed Tughlak), its governor under the Delhi empire, Dilawar Khan Ghorî, assumed independence. The sway of the Ghorî princes was probably at once extended over the northern part of the district. Modern Nimar, however, formed but an insignificant portion of the territory of the Ghorî sovereigns, and would appear to have been even then scantily populated except by aboriginal tribes.

At this period a second influx of Rajputs into the district appears to have taken place. Towards the end of the Malwa dynasty's rule a Rajput adventurer became prime minister and though under a Mohammedan king filled all the offices with Rajputs, while from the first period of the dynasty's establishment the army had been largely composed of Rajputs. FORSYTH<sup>2)</sup> records that the chief families of the district trace back the establishment of their *Watans* or *Zamindaris* for 18 or 20 generations to the time of the "Ghorî

<sup>2)</sup> J. FORSYTH: Settlement Report on the Nimar District 1869, para. 43.

Shah Badshah". All the country not already held by the Chauhan, Tomar and Bhilala chiefs appears to have been parcelled out into *tappa* or estates among the leaders of the immigrant clans. But they occupied an inferior position to that of the earlier established chiefs, contenting themselves with the title of Thakur, while the chiefs of the Chauhan and Tomar clans were called Rana, and the Bhilala chiefs Rao and Raja.

In 1370 the Tapti valley was also occupied by the Mohammedans. After a reign of 230 years the dynasty of the Farukis ended and Nimar and Khandesh were now incorporated in the Delhi empire. The year 1670 saw the first appearance of the Maratha in Khandesh. In 1740 by the treaty of Munge Petam, the Sarkars of Handia and Bijagarh, including the whole of Northern Nimar, were made over to the Peshwa in jagir. The Maratha obtained further concessions in Nimar until the whole of the district finally became an appanage of the Peshwa in 1760. In 1778 the whole of *Prant Nimar* was bestowed by the Peshwa in jagir on the Maratha leaders Sindhia, Holkar, and the Ponwar.

In 1800, however, Holkar rose to prominence and there followed eighteen years of rivalry between that prince and Sindhia. In 1802 Holkar fell on Nimar with his cavalry and laid waste to it. Khandwa, then an opulent town, was reduced to ashes, and Burhanpur was only saved by the payment of a heavy ransom. Unhappy Nimar was allowed no rest. The Pindaris who during the war had attached themselves to one or the other of the contenting sides now established themselves on their own account and, until the extinction of these bands in 1818, Nimar had scarcely a day's immunity from plunder and devastation. Fourteen times in the ten years before the pacification in 1819 were forced levies raised in the Khandwa pargana.

In 1817 Lord Hastings determined to exterminate the Pindaris. With small columns Sir JOHN MALCOLM and Colonel ADAMS moved against their headquarters, but on the approach of the English troops the robbers broke and fled in all directions. After the siege and fall of Asirgarh the war was practically over and tranquillity restored. In Nimar the British retained at first only the parganas of the Peshwa. In 1823, however, five parganas of Sindhia's Nimar were made over to them for management and these were followed by the remaining parganas in 1825, with the exception of Burhanpur town and three villages attached to it. A sum of Rs. 30,000 was deducted for expenses of management and the remainder of the revenue was paid over to Sindhia. But this arrangement proved a losing one for the British, and from 1844 the Nimar revenues were retained for payment of the Gwalior contingent.

By the treaty of 1860 all the parganas which had been under British management since 1824—25 were transferred to the British in full sovereignty, and, in addition, the town of Burhanpur with the parganas of Zainabad and Manjrod in the Tapti valley were added to the district. The Chandgarh pargana, ceded by the same treaty, was handed over by the Bhopal agency in 1862 and in May 1864 the Nimar District was transferred to the Central Provinces<sup>3</sup>).

This is, in short, an outline of the geographical position and the history of the Nimar District of the Central Provinces in which a large number of the Nimar Balahis, the subject of this study, are settled. According to their own traditions which unfortunately are rather vague, the Balahis originally came to the Nimar as menials and serfs of Rajput farmers and soldiers. Their immigration must have taken place during the reign of the Ghori princes, when the second influx of Rajput clans occurred. For the older Rajput groups of the first immigration, led by the Ranas of Piplod (descendants of the Chauhan clan), occupy at present villages with a relatively thin Balahi population, and those who now live in this area have only recently settled there. It is the Thakurs and Rajput landholders who occupied the waste land of the Nimar in the reign of the Ghori rulers, who were and are to this day the chief masters and employers of the Balahis.

Historical documents are silent as regards the Balahis and the role they may have played in the wars and political intrigues of the past. No heroic deeds of Balahis are recorded in the annals of Nimar history, the reason being, no doubt, that the Balahis were already in those times too timid and spiritless to make good soldiers and brave fighters. As a whole, they must have taken a passive part in the wars, suffering violence and oppression from the gangs of soldiers, along with the peaceful farmers and peasants whose tenants and serfs they were.

However, some Balahis, of a more enterprising spirit, are said to have entered military service in the transport section of the various armies. These Balahis used to follow the armies, being in charge of the pack-animals or driving the bullock-carts which carried the baggage for the supply of the soldiery. Old people still remember that some of their fore-fathers made a pile of money in the army service corps. But as the untouchable menials of the Rajput gentry their role must always have been a very subordinate one.

### (3) Local Distribution of the Balahis

Though in this study only the Nimar group of the Balahis is considered, the local distribution of the whole Balahi caste over

<sup>3</sup>) Cf. RUSSELL: *op. cit.*, vol. A, pp. 22—47.

northern India shall be given in a short survey. According to the Census of India 1931 the total of the Balahi population amounts to 584,648 individuals.

Of these 19,871 live in Ajmer-Merwara,  
 136 live in the United Provinces,  
 191,194 live in Central India,  
 97,828 live in Gwalior State,  
 218,837 live in Rajputana,  
 and only 56,782 live in the Central Provinces and Berar.

It appears, consequently, that the bulk of the Balahi caste lives in Central India and the adjoining parts of Rajputana and Gwalior (the latter belonging geographically to Central India). The Holkar State, for instance, which is included in the Central India Agency, counted in 1931 no less than 97,999 Balahis, that is 7.4 per cent of the state's total population. The compiler of the Holkar State Census Report 1931 writes: "Numerically, Balais<sup>4)</sup> form the most important caste. Roughly, one out of every 13 persons in the State is a Balai... Balais are a typical caste of Malwa, here they form a large section of the population. The region to the south of the Vindhya received the overflowing population of Malwa; and, consequently, in Nimar and Nemawar also the Balais are a numerous class.... The proportion of Balais in the population of Central Malwa is very large. In the Tarana pargana of this division they form one fifth of the total population.... In the Barwaha, Maheshwar, and Kasarawad parganas of Nimar this caste claims more than 10 per cent of the total population. In North Malwa it is not numerous, and from its general territorial distribution it appears that from Central Malwa the Balais have spread more towards the south than towards the north, which fact is in keeping with the theory that in the past castes have migrated from the north to the south". (Census of Central India Vol. XVI: Holkar State: Part I, p. 249, Indore 1933).

Of the 56,782 Balahis recorded in the Central Provinces and Berar in 1931 32,718 lived in the Nimar District and 20,314 in the Hoshangabad District, both Districts being the western-most districts of the Central Provinces. It is clear from the geographical distribution of the Balahis in Central India that the Nimar Balahis who form the southern-most Balahi group, must have entered Nimar District from the north and from the west, that is, from the adjoining tracts of the Holkar and Gwalior States.

The Balahis of the Hoshangabad District who belong mainly to the Gannoria and Katia sub-groups of the Balahi caste would appear to have come from Gwalior State where these sub-castes are at home

<sup>4)</sup> The *h* in the ending *-hi* is dropped in the Malwi Dialect of Hindi.





in great numbers, while the Balahis of the Nimar District who are called Nimar Balahis originally belonged to the Nimar and Malwa divisions of the Holkar State. This assumption is strongly supported by the fact that it is just the western tracts of the Khandwa tahsil in Nimar District that are inhabited by Balahis, while in the east of the Khandwa tahsil and the adjoining Harsud tahsil there are mostly Katia and Gannoria Balahis, but relatively few Nimar Balahis. The southern part of the Nimar District, the Burhanpur tahsil, is practically without Balahis, except a few families around Burhanpur. Also the genealogical registers of the Balahi clans state, with very few exceptions, that the original home villages of the different clans were either in the west (Nimar pargana of the Holkar State) or in the north-west (Malwa or Rajputana) of their present habitat.

The Nimar Balahis themselves admit what already a cursory study of the different Balahi sub-castes proves, namely, that they represent the socially lowest and culturally most primitive group of the Balahi caste. Of all Balahi sub-groups, the Nimar Balahis have so far preserved most of the original Balahi character. But even they, though perhaps to a lesser extent than other Balahi sub-castes, have been strongly influenced by the superior culture of their Aryan masters and have adopted almost completely Hindu religion and Hindu culture, but not without, however, retaining some customs and practices peculiar to their own social and religious life, traces and relics of a more primitive, but independent, past.

## Chapter II

### Racial Classification of the Balahis

Sometimes the name or the language of a tribe or caste provides a clue to its origin, but cultural and somatic characteristics are, on the whole, more conclusive evidence.

(1) As regards the name 'Balahi', R. V. RUSSELL believes that it is a corruption of the Hindi word *bulahī*, one who calls, or a messenger<sup>5)</sup>. This etymology is not very convincing, since the Balahis, when employed as village watchmen and messengers, are called *kotwal* or *kotwar* (guard of the wall). Most probably the term 'Balahi' (or Balai) is a Dravidian word and signifies 'man'. It may be traced in the South-Indian caste names as Parayan or Pulayan<sup>6)</sup>, castes which have many cultural elements in common with the

<sup>5)</sup> R. V. RUSSELL and HIRALAL: *Castes and Tribes of the Central Provinces*. London 1916, vol. II, p. 105.

<sup>6)</sup> O. R. EHRENFELS: *Mother-right in India*. Hyderabad 1941, p. 48—58.

Balahis<sup>7)</sup>. Possibly the word 'Balahi' derives from the Dravidian '*pal(-a)*' which means village or town. Balahi, then, would mean: villager. In Telugu *bala* means: small child. There are quite a number of tribes in India with similar names, as for instance: Barai, Barhai, Beria, Bharia, Bhaina, Bhil, Pallia (a sub-caste of the Bhilala).

Some Balahi sub-groups are also known by the name 'Kori'. Kori is derived from the most probably Mundarian or Austro-Asiatic<sup>8)</sup> *kor*, *hor*, *chor*, and means *man*. It is met with in many tribal names, as Korku, Korwa, Koli, Hos. In South-India the Pulayan are also known as Cheruman, the Parayan as Holey; similar low-castes are the Kolayan and Koliyan, the Kuruba and Kurumba of Kannada and Mysore.

Thus, if conclusions are allowed from the name of the Balahis, they might with great probability be considered as a race of Dravidian or Austro-Asiatic stock.

(2) The language which the Balahis at present speak does not allow any conclusions as to the racial origin of the caste. For the Balahis have no language of their own. In the Nimar they commonly speak the Nimari dialect which is a "form of the Malvi dialect of Rajasthani, but it has such marked peculiarities of its own that it must be considered separately. It has fallen under the influence of the neighbouring Gujarati and Bhil languages, and also of the Khandeshi which lies to its south"<sup>9)</sup>.

As it is the case with so many dialects, Nimari is spoken with slight differences by the various castes of the district. It probably depends on the origin of the caste whether more Gujarati or more Khandeshi words are used in speech. It is said of the Balahis that they, more than other castes of the district, mix many Marathi words into their speech, and also that they have a broader and coarser way of pronunciation which makes it easy to recognise a Balahi as soon as he begins to speak.

Townspeople, of course, and such Balahis who have enjoyed some kind of education, are able to converse in a more or less pure Hindi, but in the villages and among themselves the Balahis speak Nimari. The women in particular speak nothing else.

<sup>7)</sup> S. FUCHS: The Matriarchal Elements in the Ethnography of the Nimar Balahis. New Indian Antiquary, Poona 1942, vol. V, p. 14—18.

<sup>8)</sup> W. KOPPERS: Die Bhil in Zentralindien. Horn—Wien 1948, p. 62 and foot-note. Cf. also: G. A. GRIERSON: Linguistic Survey of India, vol. IV, p. 16.

<sup>9)</sup> G. A. GRIERSON: Linguistic Survey of India. Vol. IX, p. 60—62, Calcutta 1908.

(3) It is rather doubtful whether the racial affinities of the Nimar Balahis can be ascertained by a study of their *somatic characteristics*. For the Nimar Balahis are anything but a uniform race. Of 61 clans found in the Nimar District only 37 were genuine Balahi clans, 24 clans claiming ancestors from other castes. Of these 24 clans, 12 were founded by former Rajputs, 3 by Kunbis, 2 by Kachis, one each by a former Ahir, Gujar, Jadam, Bhilala, Bhat, Mali, and one by a Brahman. That means that almost 40 percent of the examined clans are of non-Balahi origin. The descendants of these clans have mixed and intermarried with the genuine Balahis, thereby doubtlessly modifying the original stock.

The physical measurements and blood tests which have been taken of Balahis, give testimony of this racial heterogeneity. Though up to date no measurements of Balahis have been published, a rough idea of the physical types of the Nimar Balahis can be glimpsed from a short account of the measurements which I took of 87 Balahis (40 males and 47 females)<sup>10</sup>.

#### Stature:

Mean stature of males: 159,9 cm, ranging between 171,4 and 145,3 cm.  
of females: 147,0 cm, ranging between 159,5 and 133,6 cm.

The average Balahi is of medium height, though tall, and rather short and stocky individuals are not uncommon. As the races with whom the Balahis have mixed (Rajputs, Kachis etc.) are all of more than medium height, the conclusion suggests itself that the original Balahis were rather short in stature. The mean stature of racially pure Balahis should therefore be somewhat lower than that recorded here.

#### Sitting Height:

Mean sitting height of males: 77,5 cm (Max: 89,4 cm, min: 68,6 cm),  
of females: 72,7 cm (Max: 78,6 cm, min: 66,0 cm).  
Mean Index of Stature: for males: 48,5; for females: 49,5.

The middle average Index of Stature is 53<sup>11</sup>); the Balahis consequently are rather macroscelous, i. e., their lower limbs are long in proportion to their torso. As natural, the bust of the Balahi females is larger in proportion to the legs, than the torso of the males.

Most of the Balahis are rather lean and skinny, they seem to be little inclined to obesity; fat Balahi women are very rare.

<sup>10</sup>) The complete tables are published in: Census of Central India; 1941, Vol. XVI. Holkar State, part I, p. 291—310.

<sup>11</sup>) For this and the following classifications see: R. MARTIN: Anthropometrie, Berlin 1929, p. 28 ff.

## Head Measurements:

- Head length: males: mean: 17,9 cm (Max: 19,2 cm, min: 15,9 cm)  
                   females: mean: 17,5 cm (Max: 18,9 cm, min: 15,6 cm)  
 Head breadth: males: mean: 13,8 cm (Max: 14,7 cm, min: 13,0 cm)  
                   females: mean: 13,7 cm (Max: 14,7 cm, min: 12,6 cm)  
 Mean Cephalic Index: males: 77,3  
                               females: 78,3  
 Of 40 males were dolicho-cephalic: 13 (32,5 p. c.)  
                               mezo-cephalic: 22 (55,0 p. c.)  
                               brachy-cephalic: 5 (12,5 p. c.)  
 Of 47 females: dolicho-cephalic: 13 (27,7 p. c.)  
                   mezo-cephalic: 24 (51,0 p. c.)  
                   brachy-cephalic: 8 (17,0 p. c.)  
                   hyper-brachy-cephalic: 2 (4,2 p. c.)

Rajputs and similar castes who have to a certain extent mixed with Balahis are to 75—85 per cent dolicho-cephalic<sup>42</sup>). The headform of the racially pure Balahis, therefore, should be more mezo-cephalic, inclining to brachy-cephaly, than this table indicates.

- Mean Auricular Height: males: 12,6 cm (Max: 14,4 min: 9,6 cm)  
                               females: 12,6 cm (Max: 15,5 min: 10,0 cm)  
 Of 40 males were chamae-cephalic 1 (2,5 p. c.)  
                               ortho-cephalic 4 (10,0 p. c.)  
                               hypsi-cephalic 35 (87,5 p. c.)  
 of 47 females: ortho-cephalic 4 (8,5 p. c.)  
                   hypsi-cephalic 43 (91,5 p. c.)

## Face:

- Total Length of Visage: males: mean: 17,0 cm (Max: 18,7 min: 15,2)  
                               females: mean: 16,2 cm (Max: 17,8 min: 14,7)  
 Total Facial Height: males: mean: 11,9 cm (Max: 13,3 min: 10,6)  
                               females: mean: 11,1 cm (Max: 12,1 min: 9,5)  
 Minimum Frontal Diameter: males: mean: 11,6 cm (Max: 12,5 min: 10,6)  
                               females: mean: 11,2 cm (Max: 13,0 min: 10,3)  
 Bizygomatic Diameter: males: mean: 12,1 cm (Max: 13,2 min: 10,7)  
                               females: mean: 11,7 cm (Max: 13,5 min: 10,8)  
 Biauricular Diameter: males: mean: 12,4 cm (Max: 13,4 min: 11,5)  
                               females: mean: 11,9 cm (Max: 13,1 min: 10,4)

The facial form of the Balahis is far from being uniform; but round and oval faces prevail, in particular among the women. The chin, mostly, is oval and slightly receding. The forehead, especially of females, is slightly retreating but straight foreheads are not rare among the males. Supra-orbital ridges are generally well developed.

<sup>42</sup>) R. B. DIXON: The Racial History of Man; London 1923, p. 268.

Nose:

Nose Length of males: mean: 4.8 cm (Max: 5.9 min: 3.8)

females: mean: 4.4 cm (Max: 5.1 min: 3.3)

Nose Breadth: males: mean: 3.8 cm (Max: 4.2 min: 3.2)

females: mean: 3.4 cm (Max: 3.9 min: 2.8)

Nasal Index: males: mean: 80.5 (Max: 102.6 min: 76.8)

females: mean: 76.7 (Max: 115.1 min: 60.4)

Of 40 males were leptorrhine 3 ( 7.5 p. c.)

mezorrhine 24 (60.0 p. c.)

platirrhine 12 (30.0 p. c.)

hyper-platirrhine 1 ( 2,5 p. c.)

Of 47 females were leptorrhine 10 (21.3 p. c.)

mezorrhine	30	(63.6 p. c.)
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platyrrhine 5 (10.7 p. c.)

hyper-platirrhine 2 ( 4.4 p. c.)

The relatively high percentage of leptorrhine types among the females is remarkable. The nasal root is often depressed, concave nasal bridges are frequent, especially among the women.

*Skin Colour:*

According to the „Hautfarben-Tafel“ of B. SCHULTZ (Berlin) the skin colour of 40 Balahi males was:                      of 47 Balahi females was:

1 . . . . . No. 12

No. 18

1	.	.	.	.	No. 18	brown	1	.	.	.	.	No. 18
10	.	.	.	.	No. 19		2	.	.	.	.	No. 19

[illegible]

3	.	.	.	.	No. 20	4	.	.	.	.	No. 20
10					No. 21	4					No. 21

10	. . . . .	No. 21	} dark brown	} 4	. . . . .	No. 21
10	. . . . .	No. 22				

10	.	.	.	.	.	No. 22	22	.	.	.	.	.	No. 22
9						No. 93	9						No. 93

3 . . . . . No. 23] [ 8 . . . . . No. 23]

2 . . . . . No. 24 light black 6 . . . . . No. 24

Thus the Skin Colour of the Balahis appears to vary from a light brown to black. It is noticeable that the skin colour of females is darker than that of males.

Eye Colour:

According to the „Augenfarben-Tafel“ of R. MARTIN and B. SCHULTZ, the eye colour of 40 males was: of 47 females was:

No. 71

1	.	.	.	.	.	No. 7	} light brown
1	.	.	.	.	.	No. 9	

10	.	.	.	No. 12	brown	{	6	.	.	.	.	No. 12
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12	. . . . .	No. 13}	dark brown	{	9	. . . . .	No. 13
11	. . . . .	No. 14}		{	24	. . . . .	No. 14
4	. . . . .	No. 15			7	. . . . .	No. 15
1	. . . . .	No. 16	black		2	. . . . .	No. 16

The eye-slits of the Balahis are usually straight, but occasionally oblique eyes are found. The epicanthic fold is rare, but not altogether missing.

#### Hair Colour:

According to the „Haarfarben-Tafel“ of FISCHER-SALLER (Kiel), the hair colour of 40 males was:

1	. . . . .	No. V
6	. . . . .	No. W
17	. . . . .	No. X
11	. . . . .	No. Y

of 47 females was:

1	. . . . .	No. U
1	. . . . .	No. V
5	. . . . .	No. W
15	. . . . .	No. X
24	. . . . .	No. Y

The hair colour of the Balahis is a very dark brown or black, but a few Balahis are found with hair of a light brown colour; in infancy a light brown hair colour is not infrequent.

Of 40 Balahi males only 9 had slightly wavy hair, of 47 females 4 had wavy, and 1 woman curly hair, the hair of the others being straight.

A good number of Balahi males have a strong growth of facial and body hair, bald-headed Balahis are rare, except in advanced age. But the majority of the Balahi males have sparse beard hair and even less body hair.

The data, given here in a brief summary, clearly show that the Balahis are not a caste approaching to anything like uniformity of features or purity of race. It is almost impossible to make out the racial characteristics of the original Balahis, since they have received many accretions from Aryan and non-Aryan races of India and are still admitting any member of a higher caste than theirs into the community, even aboriginals.

It would be most interesting to examine Balahis who, in isolation and seclusion, have refrained from intermixture with other castes and thus better preserved their original physical type. But so far measurements have not yet been taken of any such group (which may be found in Central India or Rajputana).

## Blood Tests:

In 1941 Dr. E. W. MACFARLANE tested the blood of Nimar Balahis, and found the results to be as follows:

"After subtracting data belonging to members of the same immediate family, the blood group distribution was obtained from two hundred Balahis as shown in Table I.

(Table I)

People:	No:	Nos and Percentages in groups:				Frequencies:			D/O
		O	A	B	AB	P	q	r	
Balahi	200	61 30,5%	64 32%	60 30%	15 7,5%	.222	.209	.552	1,2

The Balahi data are unusual for India, where there is characteristically a preponderance of group B over group A, especially in the lower castes, except in the south-west<sup>13</sup>). In the Balahis there is an equal distribution of the three main blood groups, a condition that has hitherto been found in this country only among the Mundas, and the related Maria Gonds far to the East, in the Mahrattas, Rajputs, Jats, and Pathans<sup>14</sup>). Because the Balahis do not resemble the Mundari speaking tribes in general appearance and have not been linked with them by scholars, we may neglect the Mundas at present. Until more blood group data are available from Rajputana, the United Provinces and Bombay, we cannot speculate on the resemblance in blood group distribution between the Balahis and the castes listed above from those regions. The Balahis have been in contact since the middle ages with the Rajputs who twice migrated over this part of India during the Moghul wars of the fourteenth century and earlier<sup>15</sup>).

... The Balahi data seem to indicate that the ancestors of this caste migrated chiefly from the north-west to their present habitat, since Indian groups possessing frequencies for both the genes A and B lying between 0,210 and 0,259 are the Balahis, Jats, Mundas, Rajputs, and Pathans only. The value 1,2 for D/O (Table I) is not high enough to suggest genetic instability (Boyd)<sup>16</sup>). It would appear that any accessions to the Balahi caste in the past few

<sup>13</sup>) E. W. E. MACFARLANE: Blood group distribution in India with special reference to Bengal. *Journ. Genetics*, 36: 225—237. 1938.

<sup>14</sup>) For comparison of all samples see: W. C. BOYD: Blood groups. *Tabulae Biologicae*, 17: 113—240, 1939, for original references, see also MACFARLANE: Blood group distribution in *Journ. Genetics*.

<sup>15</sup>) R. V. RUSSELL: *Castes and Tribes of C. P.* London 1916.

<sup>16</sup>) BOYD: *Op. cit.*

generations have been genetically negligible. Serologically they are distinct from the depressed Mahars and Dhers<sup>17)</sup>.

(4) While somatic measurements and blood tests give no clear evidence as to the racial origin of the Balahis, their cultural and social relations to other castes may suggest a more accurate classification. Their caste traditions too may be helpful in this direction. R. V. RUSSELL<sup>18)</sup> calls the Balahis "a low functional caste of weavers and village watchmen found in the Nimar and Hoshangabad Districts and in Central India. The Balahis seem to be an occupational group, probably an offshoot of the large Kori caste of weavers one of whose sub-divisions is shown as Balahi in the United Provinces."

RUSSELL believes that the Balahis are a functional caste, formed perhaps by a number of racially different caste groups pursuing the same occupation. While it must be admitted that racially the Balahis are certainly not without considerable intermixtures, the original Balahi caste, before this mixture and interbreeding, seems indeed to have belonged to a caste in which weaving was the main occupation. For, according to the oldest traditions of the Nimar Balahis (of which more in the chapter on religion), the son of the ancestor and founder of the caste, Julaha by name, was a weaver. The second founder of the caste, who led the emigration of the Balahis down to Malwa and the Nerbudda valley, was also a weaver. This does not exclude the possibility that the Balahis originally belonged to a very ancient and numerically strong race which, in the course of time, branched off into separate caste groups, with occupational differentiation, but with fundamentally the same racial and cultural background. In the course of the centuries these separated groups may have developed distinctive features, in different environments, so that today it is difficult to prove their basic relationship.

RUSSELL's surmise that the Balahis are an offshoot of the Kori caste of the United Provinces is very plausible, since the Balahis of the Nimar, and still more the Balahis of the Hoshangabad District, are indeed also called Kori. The people of the country, Balahis as well as others, are of the opinion that Balahis and Kori are of one caste though now this caste may have several sub-divisions which do not intermarry and interdine.

The author of the valuable study *The Chamars*<sup>19)</sup> is of the opinion that the Balahis are of the same stock as the Chamars. He

<sup>17)</sup> MACFARLANE: Blood groups among Balahis (weavers), Bhils, Korkus & Mundas, with a note on Pardhis, and Aboriginal Blood Types. Journ. R. As. Soc. Bengal Vol. VII, 1941, No. 1, p. 16 ff.

<sup>18)</sup> R. V. RUSSELL and HIRALAL: op. cit. vol. II, p. 105.

<sup>19)</sup> G. W. BRIGGS: *The Chamars*. London 1920, p. 17-33.

asserts that in the Gorakhpur and Lucknow divisions the Kori (or Koli) Chamars are not only field labourers, grooms, and shoe-makers, but also weavers. In some places (in the Punjab) people still remember the time when the Kori (weavers) and the Kori (Chamars) intermarried and interdined. In Mirzapur the Kori is known as Chamar-Kori. In Bikaner State a caste of leather-workers is known as Balai. In Central India one section of the Balahis are weavers, the other skinners of animals and dealers in hides. In Punjab some Chamars who take up groom's work are called Balahi or Balai. Another Chamar sub-division, the Bilai, are grooms and village messengers, but also weavers and field labourers.

The compiler of the Census of the Holkar State 1931 has come independently to the same conclusion and believes that Chamars and Balahis were originally of the same stock. In support of his theory which is certainly worthy of consideration but must be corroborated by a more exact study of the racial and cultural characteristics of both castes, he writes as follows: "Chamars and Balahis appear to have been members of one community which, later on, was divided into two sections. Both castes are considered low and untouchable; but the Balai enjoys a slightly better status. Probably a section of Chamars gave up the unclean occupation of removing and skinning dead animals, and in course of time was separately recognised as a caste. How this section was given the name Balai is not known. The occupations followed by the Balais are usually agricultural labour, or cultivation, weaving, and menial service of the village. There are no Balais in Northern India, although the Chamars are undoubtedly a caste of those parts. This leads to the presumption that the severing of the Balai from the original Chamar stock took place after the Chamars had settled in the central regions of Malwa. This view is supported by the fact that in the south of the Vindhya the Balais are regarded as immigrants from Malwa, while no explanation is forthcoming as to whence Malwa received these people"<sup>20</sup>).

The compiler of this Census Report was obviously not aware of the connection between Balahis and Kori, else he would not have assumed that the Balahis separated from the Chamars in Central India. Possibly this separation first took place in the United Provinces. But even among the Balahis of the Nimar there are still some traces of this relationship with the Chamars, for the Kotwars (village watchmen) who are almost always Balahis still skin the dead cattle of the village and sell the hides to the Chamars for tanning. Skinning and dealing in hides are occupations which in

<sup>20</sup>) Census of Central India 1931: vol. XVI: Holkar State, p. 250, Indore 1933.

other regions of India are only performed by Chamars. Socially the Chamar tanners are lower than the Nimar Balahis, but Mochi-Chamars (shoe makers etc.) are higher in caste. In customs and habits of life both castes are not very different.

Another question is whether the Balahis are related to the Kolis, an important caste of Western India. Unfortunately this caste, numbering some three and a half million souls, has never been made the subject of serious investigation. W. KOPPERS, in a short essay, has collected all the literature on the Kolis and complains that little is known about them<sup>21</sup>).

J. TOD, the famous author of *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*<sup>22</sup>), connects the Kolis with the Kori weaver caste (of which the Balahis are a sub-caste) and states that "almost all the cloth weavers throughout India are of the Kori caste, though they endeavour to conceal their origin under the term Julaha, which ought only to distinguish the Moslem weaver". Most of the other authors who write either about the Kolis in Western India or the Kori or Koli of the United Provinces ignore the possibility of such a relationship. The fact that these castes are so widely scattered and have been strongly and diversely influenced by various foreign peoples, would account for their widely divergent customs and traditions. The question, therefore, must be left open whether the Balahis of Central India (in the geographical sense of the term) form a link between the Kori or Koli of the United Provinces and the Koli of Western India. The extent of our present knowledge of the ethnography of both caste groups does not admit of any really definite opinions on this subject.

Though the Balahis of the Nimar do not admit any relationship with the Mahars, another caste of weavers, village watchmen and field labourers, there is little doubt of close connection between the two castes. For in their customs and habits of life the Balahis have so many points in common with the Mahars that at least a mutual cultural influence can be safely assumed. Incidental differences can easily be explained by different environment and contact with different peoples.

The Balahis themselves maintain that the Mahars are the "Balahis of the Maratha country". But because in the Nimar the Mahars eat the meat of horses and deal in bones, the Balahis regard them as inferior to themselves, while the Nimar Mahars look down

<sup>21</sup>) W. KOPPERS: The Kolis in North-West Central India, in *Ethnos, Journal of the Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, Stockholm*, 1943, 1-2, p 1-18.

<sup>22</sup>) J. TOD: *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Ed. by W. CROOKE, vol. III, p. 1280 ff, London 1920.

upon the Balahis as beef eaters and cattle skimmers. However, these social considerations are of superficial value and do not eliminate the many cultural and racial similarities in existence between these two castes.

A more detailed and comprehensive study of the Chamars as well as of the Kori, of the Mahars and the Koli may one day lead to the conclusion that all these castes are branches of a uniform basic race which at one time inhabited the central regions of the Indian sub-continent. This basic race must have been an agricultural people with a certain degree of material culture in which the art of weaving and skill in leather-work were specially developed. The social structure and the religion of this race must have borne a strong matriarchal character of which many traces are still found in the customs and habits of life of all these four caste groups. Whether this race belonged to the Dravidian or to a pre-Dravidian — perhaps Austro-Asiatic — group of peoples, cannot yet be decided with any degree of certainty.

## Part II — Sociology of the Nimar Balahis

### Chapter III

#### The Caste, Clan and Family

##### (1) Inner Structure of the Caste

The Balahis, as a caste, have several endogamous sub-divisions in the Central Provinces: Socially the highest are the Kori Balahis, then follow the Gannoria and the Katia Balahis. The Nimar Balahis, occupying the westernmost regions of the Central Provinces are said to rank lower than the other sub-divisions<sup>22</sup>). The Balahis of the Burhanpur tahsil are also called Bunkar (weaver) but they are not different from the Nimar Balahis with whom they interdine and intermarry. In Hoshangabad the Balahis are sometimes identified with the Mahars. The Katia Balahis are not only weavers but also spinners; until about 15 years ago they interdined with the Nimar Balahis and occasionally even intermarried with them. Then, at a caste meeting at Harda, they decided to discontinue this practice because the Nimar Balahis are beef eaters and skimmers of dead animals, an occupation the Katia Balahis have abandoned.

The Nimar Balahis, again, are sub-divided into different groups which generally do not intermarry though there is no prohibition against either interdining and intermarrying, except when a certain

<sup>22</sup>) RUSSELL and HIRALAL: *op. cit.* p. 106.

subdivision renounces beef-eating and cattle-skinning. This subdividing is based on the territorial distribution of the caste members. Thus in the Nimar District the Khandwa group includes all the Balahis of the Khandwa tahsil and parts of the neighbouring tahsils, the Mundi group comprises all Balahis of the western part of the Harsud tahsil and parts of the Hoshangabad District. Another sub-division is centred at Khargone in the Holkar State.

The different sub-groups of the Nimar Balahis are each headed by a caste headman who is called the *mukhya jat-patel*.

## (2) Admission into the Balahi Caste

New accretions from other castes are always welcome to the Balahis. The only condition for admission into the Balahi community is that the applicant comes from a higher caste. No special formalities are required for admission. The usual applicants are persons who have lost all their relatives and caste-fellows in a village and consequently have associated with the Balahis; or they have been expelled from their own caste and, for certain reasons, are unable to gain readmission. Instead of remaining outcasts for ever they prefer to join the Balahi community. Others may have fallen in love with a Balahi woman, or a girl or woman of a higher caste may have been seduced by a Balahi. In the latter case the woman is never taken back by her community, and is therefore obliged to join the Balahis. Such cases are relatively frequent.

Once such a man (or woman) begins to live with the Balahis, eats and drinks with them, he (or she) is automatically regarded as a member of the caste, without any formal admission ceremony. After some time the *bhat* (Balahi genealogist and registrar) may be called; or on his occasional visit to the village he is requested to write the name of the new caste-member into his register. If the new member is a man, he may retain his original clan name and thus become the founder of a new Balahi clan; this practice explains the identity of several clan names in different castes. Sometimes the new-comer is adopted by another genuine Balahi clan. A woman from a higher caste acquires the membership of a Balahi clan by marriage with a Balahi. The new caste member, or her husband, in the case of a woman, pays a small fee to the *bhat* for entering the new name into his clan register. Perhaps also the *jat-patel* is invited and the fellow-villagers of the caste are given a caste dinner, or a few bottles of liquor are drunk on this occasion. But there is no necessity for such expenditure.

R. V. RUSSELL writes that a man who wants to become a Balahi must undergo certain rites of admission. "The head and face of the neophyte are shaved clean, and he is made to lie on the ground

under a string-cot. A number of Balahis sit on this and wash themselves, letting the water drip from their bodies on to the man below until he is well drenched; he then gives a feast to the caste fellows, and is considered to have become a Balahi" <sup>24</sup>). The Balahis whom I asked about this ceremony of admission into the caste denied any knowledge of such a ritual. However, this very ceremony is performed by other castes in their ritual of admission into their caste, for instance by the Bhilalas of the Holkar State. It is possible that in an individual case the Balahis had just imitated the Bhilalas, and that the informant of RUSSELL had heard of this event.

The Balahis are socially on such a low level that only few castes are barred from admission to the Balahi caste. Except sweepers, Chamars, Dhobis, Basors and Mangs, Nahals, and a few other castes which practice certain customs objectionable to Balahis, all are welcome. Such admission into the Balahi community is today not as rare as one might think. Almost in every village there are persons who have joined the Balahi caste for one or the other reason. In a village near Khandwa, for instance, a young Rajput widow had a love affair with her Balahi servant. Not able to remarry in her own caste she preferred to give up her property and caste and to marry her Balahi lover. The pair was forced by the enraged relatives of the woman to leave the village and to settle at some other place. Though the Balahi is only a daily labourer in the village where the couple settled down, the woman is still much in love with him and apparently quite content with her lot.

Another woman, the daughter of a Korku village *patel*, some years ago was found having illicit dealings with a Balahi. Though the Korkus generally are not so particular in punishing offences of the caste laws, and usually reinstate an outcast after payment of a fine and a caste dinner, in this particular case the Korku woman could not find a Korku husband and finally eloped with the Balahi. After her first husband had died, she eloped with another Balahi who, unfortunately, was her kinsman by adoption. The lovers, already advanced in age with grand-children of their own, left the village and settled in the near-by Holkar State, till the indignation of their relatives and caste fellows had cooled down. After a while they returned to their village and sought readmission into the caste. Their request was granted after payment of a fine and a dinner.

A Balahi who takes a wife from a lower caste than his own is expelled from the caste. He can only be readmitted after her dismissal. But often, if such a man is determined not to give in and is stubborn enough to live in isolation for some years, his fellow

<sup>24</sup>) RUSSELL and HIRALAL: *op. cit.* p. 107—108.

villagers and relatives slowly begin to relax the severe censures against him, they even begin to smoke with him and, first secretly, then more and more openly, they eat and drink with him. At last his excommunication is silently overlooked by all the fellow villagers and at a caste banquet or a marriage or funeral feast the man is formally reinstated with the full rights of a Balahi, without being obliged to give up his "morganatic" wife. Such marriages have repeatedly taken place in villages where the Balahis live in close contact with Chamars and Nahals. But cases are known when even a sweeper woman has been suffered to live with a Balahi.

### (3) Origin and Character of the Balahi Clans

While the territorial sub-sections of the Balahi caste, headed by the *mukhya jat-patel*, form practically endogamous groups, these sub-sections are again sub-divided into smaller exogamous groups, the septs or clans. The Balahis call these exogamous groups which claim descent from a common ancestor *got* or *kul*, sometimes also *jat* (caste). While according to the genealogical concepts of the higher Hindu castes *got* (clan) and *kul* (family) are not identical, the Balahis use these terms indiscriminately. They, consequently, do not have different *got* and *kul* names. The Balahi septs evidently comprise a number of families united by the bond of blood-relationship derived from descent from a common ancestor. Obviously, the Balahi *got* (or *kul*) has grown out of a single family which later-on developed into a joint-family the different branches of which in the course of generations have separated. Though in present times many Balahi clans have broken up and single families have in search for land or employment left their native village, many Balahis still know the name of the original home village of their clan. But even today many village communities still belong to a single *kul*, with only a few stray families from other clans living in the same village, the reason being that either a single family increased in the course of time to a whole village community, or that a group of clan members decided to leave together their native village and to emigrate to a new site. The fact that a village community frequently belongs to a single clan is probably also the main reason why the Balahis still observe some sort of village exogamy.

At present times the Balahis do not attach much importance to clan relationship. Members of the same clan do not feel any mutual obligation on the strength of this relationship. There are Balahis who no more remember their clan name and are reminded of it only on occasion of a marriage. For clan exogamy is still strictly observed and marriage between clan members would be regarded as

incest. Many Balahis do not anymore worship their clan gods or observe the special laws and prohibitions of their clans.

Nothing definite is known about the origin and early history of the genuine Balahi clans. There is some evidence that originally the social structure of the Balahis bore a matriarchal character<sup>25</sup>), but at present Balahi society is organised on patriarchal lines, obviously a result of the strong influence of the high Hindu castes. But even in the ritual of clan-god worship, in the rules and restrictions peculiar to the different clans the genuine Balahi clans do not differ much from those which owe their origin to adopted former members of other castes<sup>26</sup>).

#### (4) The Family

As among the Hindus in general, also among the Balahis a family consists not only of husband and wife and their children, it generally includes also the wives and children of the grown-up sons. While the daughters leave home when they begin to live with their husbands, the sons are supposed to stay with their parents even after they are mature and have started a family of their own. The Balahi family is thus more often than not a family-group, a so-called joint-family.

When the wife of a grown-up son comes to live with him, the latter may claim from his parents separate sleeping quarters if the parental house is large enough to allow such an arrangement. But otherwise there is no change in the life of the family. The married son continues to live with his parents and brothers and sisters as before his marriage, while his wife is treated like a daughter of the family. Even if there are several grown-up sons in the house, the father remains the undisputed head of the family who has the last word in all matters concerning the family. In theory his authority is supreme and wife and children have no right to voice their opinions or to veto his decisions. But in practice a father's powers are not quite so absolute; many a clever Balahi woman knows to rule her husband with more or less discretion, and also the grown-up sons want to be consulted in matters of importance. With advancing age, the father leaves the management of the family affairs more and more to the eldest son.

In a well-ordered joint-family all its members contribute their share to the support of the whole family. If the family owns some

<sup>25</sup>) St. FUCHS: *The Matriarchal Elements in the Ethnography of the Nimar Balahis*: *New Indian Antiquary*, vol. V. Nos. 4 & 5, 1942, pp. 1—18.

<sup>26</sup>) Details of clan god worship and clan rules will be given in the chapter on religion.

land, the sons work in the fields under the supervision and direction of the father; or else they take service as field-hands or daily labourers. Also the women and girls of the house work in the fields when required, besides doing all the house-work which they divide among themselves. One woman cooks the meal for all members of the family, while the other grinds the flour and a third one cleans house and stable. The next day, or after a week, they change duties and another woman does the cooking. But each woman minds her own children. Only when all women have to go to the fields do they leave their babies to the care of a girl who stays at home. The mistress of the house who often has the reputation of a tyrant ruling her daughters-in-law with an iron hand usually takes the easiest share of the house-work. The younger women find it quite natural if their mother-in-law takes it easy after a life-time of hard work. But sometimes it also happens that one or the other of the younger women is lazy and neglects her duties. This frequently gives cause to endless quarrels among the women.

After the death of the father, the eldest brother becomes head of the joint-family. But his authority is not as great as his father's and his younger brothers do not always accept his orders without criticism. They demand that he is strictly impartial and takes no advantage for himself of his position. On the contrary, they expect him to take the heavier part of the work on his own shoulders and to treat their families with more generosity than his own. If therefore the eldest brother does not live up to this ideal, the others soon leave the parental house and start an independent household. Nowadays it even happens that a joint-family breaks up when the father is still alive; this may be the result of a quarrel between father and sons, or between the sons alone, but more often a separation is unavoidable for economic reasons. If new fields are not available for the growing family, or if employment is scarce in the native village, the younger sons are forced to leave the native village and to seek employment elsewhere.

On the whole, the joint-family system appears to be of advantage to the Balahis, at least economically. Generally Balahis who live in a joint-family are better off than others who live in separate households. A common household, first of all, saves a lot of expenses. In a joint family less is wasted and gets spoiled than in a household of few persons. Fields and cattle can better be taken care of and with less expenses, for members of the family work better and cheaper than paid servants. When a member of the family gets sick, there is somebody to nurse him, and even a prolonged absence from work is less disastrous than in a small household. Especially the weavers among the Balahis find a joint-family system of advantage because

hand-loom weaving requires many hands to help in the preparation of the yarn for the loom. Even the money-lenders give a loan easier and under better conditions, because they have a better chance of getting their money back if the debtor belongs to a joint-family.

### (5) Property Concepts and Heredity

The owner of the entire property of a joint-family is the head of the family. Immovable property is, of course, subject to the laws and customs of the country where the Balahis live. They differ widely in *malguzari*<sup>27)</sup> and *ryotwari*<sup>28)</sup> areas, in the formerly British territory and in the native states. But within the premises of the house everything, though it may be in common use of all the members of the family, is the indisputed property of the head of the family. No exception is made with the property which his wife brings into the family at marriage; not only cattle, cooking vessels, but also her jewels become the property of her husband. The wages which a woman earns by working in the fields of the landlord belong to her husband. The ornaments he gives her are hers for the wearing only. If she leaves him or returns to her family after his death, she cannot take them or anything else with her except the clothes she is wearing, or what she herself has brought into the family at the time of her marriage. Nor can a woman give anything away without the consent of her husband, not even to her own sons or daughters.

But there are women who conceal a part of their earnings for the days of need. Or they provide for the time of widowhood, in case their husband dies before them; or else they want to save money to defray the expenses of their own funeral if they should die first. It happens not infrequently that, in breaking down an old house, silver-coins or jewels are found amongst the debris of the mud-walls. The treasure had been hoarded there by a thrifty house-wife, but circumstances or a sudden death prevented her from revealing the hiding place to her relatives and heirs. Often an old widow, ill-treated by her relatives or grown miserly in her age, does not want her treasure to fall into the hands of her heirs. So she takes its secret with her to the grave.

In Panjria, a village near Khandwa, an old widow had thus saved a pot full of rupees. She had buried her treasure in the floor of her small hut under the fire-place and carefully obliterated all traces of it. Then she had recited powerful *mantras* (magic words) and many curses to prevent thieves from stealing her money. (The Balahis believe that certain *mantras* are so powerful that no one

<sup>27)</sup> privately owned land.

<sup>28)</sup> government owned land.

would be able to dig at a spot thus placed under a spell even if he knew that a treasure was buried there.) When the old widow came to die, she called her favourite grand-son and told him where he could find the money. She enjoined on him the strict order not to disclose the secret of the treasure to anyone, not even to his father (her son) until his marriage had been arranged. For, as she told him, the money was earmarked to defray the expenses of his wedding. But soon after the death of the old grand-mother the boy disclosed the secret to his father and the treasure was unearthed. About two thousand rupees were found in the pot. Overjoyed at the unexpected windfall, the boy's father at once spent a large portion of the money in a grand funeral banquet in honour of his mother, while the rest of the treasure was used to celebrate the marriage of his eldest son. The boy for whom the grand-mother had intended the money got nothing. Though the Balahis generally do not approve of such a disregard of a mother's wish, they cannot take action against a man who spends the money as he likes. For he has the right of free disposal of his mother's savings.

As long as the sons and daughters live with their parents they must hand over to the father all that they earn. Sons who secede from the joint-family while their father is still alive cannot claim any possessions except such which their wives have brought into the house. While the head of the joint-family has no right to withhold such property, he may rightly refuse to give anything of his own possessions to a son who leaves him. For this reason a young Balahi who thinks of separating from his parents often tries to keep secretly a part of his earnings for himself, so that even if he gets no help from his parents he will have saved enough to start an independent household. But more often he is obliged to take service with a wealthy farmer who is willing to advance him a part of his wages.

A married daughter who returns on a visit to her parents cannot keep for herself any money that she earns during the time of her stay at home. She must hand over her earnings to her father who feeds her. But her father may allow her to keep this money if he can afford to be so generous.

After the death of the father the eldest son takes over the entire property of the family — there is no distribution of the family possessions if the heirs consent to live in a joint-family. Like his father before, now the eldest of the brothers keeps in his custody the money, the silver-ornaments of the women, and the other treasures of the family. He must provide for the whole family, and it is his particular task to arrange for the marriage of his unmarried brothers and sisters. If necessary he must even postpone the marriage of his own children in order to have his brothers and sisters married at due time.

But when the brothers decide upon breaking up their joint-family and to set up their own housekeeping, they divide the family possessions between themselves in equal parts. Their sisters, whether married or unmarried, receive no share, for daughters can inherit only if the male line is extinct. The brothers are not even bound to pay the legacies which a father makes on his death-bed for his daughters. But though strictly speaking they have no obligation, they will rarely refuse to part with possessions which their father intended for their sisters. Generally such legacies consist in silver ornaments, clothes, or water vessels of brass, rarely of a cow or calf, and almost never of immovable property. To avoid property disputes after his death, a man often gives such presents to his daughters on their wedding day, or when their first child is born.

From the general distribution of the family property is of course excluded any property which the wives of the sons have brought into the family on their wedding day. Such possessions go with their respective owners even if they have been in common use by the whole family.

The wife of a deceased Balahi receives an equal share of the inheritance with her grown-up sons if she decides to live by herself. Else she is free to choose the son with whom she wants to stay and this son receives her share of the inheritance for her support. Also the son who takes charge of the unmarried brothers and sisters receives a bigger share, in proportion to his expenses. When the mother dies her share is again divided between her sons. If one of the brothers dies without children, his property, in case his wife returns to her parents or remarries, is divided among the surviving brothers. If he leaves a widow with children, she inherits the whole property if she decides to stay with her children. But if she wants to remarry she can take away only her personal belongings and a baby at breast. Her other children remain with the family of her late husband and are adopted by one of his brothers. And even her small baby must be returned to the family of her late husband as soon as it is weaned.

When the brothers divide the family property between themselves, they are not likely to overlook anything of value. The house is partitioned off into equally big rooms by walls with a separate entrance. If, however, the house is too small for such a partition, the elder brother may occupy the whole house, but he must give his younger brothers sufficient space in the court-yard to build another house or to add a new wing to the old house. This is often the reason why the Balahis live in such diminutive huts or rooms and in such over-crowded quarters of the village.

Fields and fruit-trees too are equally distributed among the brothers. The lots of a field are divided till they are too small for proper cultivation. If the number of fruit-trees is not sufficient to give a tree to each heir, the trees remain common property of the heirs. But at the time of ripening such trees are closely guarded against anyone of the share-holders taking his portion in advance. As soon as the fruits are ripe, the owners of the tree come together and pick the fruits, then divide them between themselves. But not only fields, fruit trees and houses are divided in equal parts among the heirs, also cattle, furniture, silver-ornaments, and money to the last penny. Generally the distribution of the inheritance among the heirs is easier done than it appears because most of the Balahis are poor.

A Balahi is, strictly speaking, only responsible for the maintenance of his own family. But good old Balahi tradition demands that if he is in a position to do so he should support also the poor and needy among his relatives. A wealthy Balahi is expected to give loans, without charging interest and without much hope of ever being repaid, to his poor relatives. He is asked to pay for the marriage expenses when a nephew or niece, or a poor cousin, wants to get married. He is visited by his needy relatives who, under the pretext of working for him, help him to finish off his grain store, his savings, and his ward-robe.

I once had a Balahi servant who, getting a fairly good pay and being no spendthrift, began to prosper. Without children, he lived quite comfortably with his wife and mother who both worked hard and earned as much as was needed for household expenses. Thus the man was able to save almost his entire monthly wages for the days of need or for the purchase of a field. But his relatives spoiled all his fair prospects. His sister who lived in the same village had a number of small children and a very lazy husband. The family was constantly in need and demanded help from the prosperous relative. When his sister gave birth to twins, my servant bought a cow to provide milk for the babies. But the cow was soon sold away and the proceeds spent. Now and again the poor sister got a loan of money or grain to feed her starving children, while for weeks her own husband remained idle. But this was not all. Every year in the beginning of the hot season, the elder brother of my servant came with his whole family for a long visit. Since there is not much work in the hot season, the guest had soon nothing to eat but what he got from his brother. But invariably, with the beginning of the rainy season, when he could have got casual work, the man disappeared and returned to his own village, afraid that he would have to share his wages with his brother whose bread he

had been eating during the summer months. When the son of this elder brother became of age to marry, my servant was requested to defray the marriage expenses. He had to take his pay for six months in advance to meet the expenses of the wedding. When I scolded him for his unreasonable generosity, he replied: "We are of one family. How can I let my own blood starve?" His wife too began to grumble when she saw all the hard-earned rupees go to lazy relatives. But her husband scolded and even beat her when she objected to taking care of his relatives.

There is, however, no doubt as to the ownership of property among the relatives of a family group. Whatever the individual man earns or inherits, is really his property. But the use of his possessions is not entirely his own affair. The relatives too want to have a share in it. The owner is but a trustee for his property, and its right disposal will be shared more or less by other relatives. This system is, of course, not favourable to ruthless accumulation of wealth, but it has also its distinct disadvantages: It accounts partly for the lack of personal enterprise and energy among the Balahis. They see no meaning in working for more than the bare necessities of life, since other relatives would take advantage of their thrift and diligence. Others take life easy and shun hard work as much as possible, confident that their relatives will see them through all difficulties and will feed them and their families when they are in distress. The proverbial improvidence of the Balahis in planning ahead and forestalling the needs of the future is fostered by this system of mutual help among relatives.

### (6) Individual Property

Considering the wide extent of family property rights, not much appears to be left for exclusively individual possessions. Clothes and shoes may be counted as such. But they too are often used by other members of the family. In a common household the consent of the owner may be presumed if any one wants to use his clothes or shoes. But if the relatives live in separate households, they will ask before borrowing one another's things.

Ornaments and jewels of the womenfolk are not considered their private property but looked upon as a family investment in property. In times of need these valuables are pawned to the money-lenders, as a security for a loan, or they are sold for the current silver or gold price. When a woman elopes, her husband is often more concerned to get back the ornaments than the wife.

The only thing which a Balahi may consider his exclusive property is his wife. How often do the Balahis express this their conviction in unmistakable terms: *Mera mai hai!* (she is my property).

And that she is in fact! The husband, or his father in his place, has "bought" her for the price of about a water-buffalo and, according to Balahi custom, he may treat her as he likes, nobody has the right to interfere. A married woman has no juridical rights, or rather no rights which she could exercise against her husband. If she is ill-treated she may run away and seek the protection of her parents, or of another man, but she cannot accuse her husband of bad behaviour before the caste council. A divorce is valid only after the bride-price or an equivalent sum has been paid to the husband in compensation. It even happens that a Balahi, dissatisfied with his wife, makes arrangements to give her to another Balahi, or even to a Mohammedan or sweeper. On a market day the disaffected husband invites his wife to accompany him to the bazaar and, at a given moment, he will hand her over to the other man with whom the bargain has previously been made. After paying on the spot the agreed sum in cash or in kind, the new husband will carry her off quickly in a covered cart. As a price for his wife, the former husband gets a certain amount of money, a pair of bullocks, or a water-buffalo. The Balahi caste rules do not forbid such transactions though most Balahis do not at all approve of them.

While it is rather unusual that a Balahi, as it were, sells his wife against her will, it happens more often that the lover of a married Balahi woman approaches her husband with an offer of money if he agrees to give her free. Some years ago it happened at Khandwa that a Mohammedan fell in love with the pretty wife of a Balahi. He asked her husband to give her up for a waterbuffalo and Rs. 15. When the Balahi indignantly refused, the Mohammedan threatened to give him a terrible beating. At last the woman herself advised her husband to set her free, saying: "This Mohammedan will kill you unless you allow me to go to him. It is better for you to let me go!" For a while the Balahi refused his consent, but then he succumbed to the persistent threats and requests of the Mohammedan and exchanged his wife for a water-buffalo and Rs. 15.

Such practices are not unknown among other low castes of the district, they are not peculiar Balahi customs. While various other low castes agree with the Balahis that a woman is the property of her husband whom he may even give away for money, few castes allow a woman to return to her parents when her husband dies or divorces her. Among the Chamars, for instance, it is the rule that a woman after her husband's death marries his younger brother. Or, if she marries another man the bride-price is paid to the family of her late husband. Among the Balahis a widowed or divorced girl returns to her parents who receive the bride-price on her remarriage. This custom allows some Balahis to make a bargain of their married

or marriageable daughters. When a married daughter comes home to visit her parents, they quietly give her away to another man on cash-payment. The consent of the daughter is not always requested for such a transaction. When the first husband of the girl demands her return, her parents pay him a part of the money which they have received from their daughter's second husband.

While it would be far from true to assume that a Balahi considers his wife, daughter, or sister mainly as a financial asset or liability, it cannot be denied that this aspect also at times receives his considered attention. In this, as in the other aspects and rules regarding property the Balahis differ little from the other people of the district.

## Chapter IV

### Regulation of Public and Private Life

#### (1) The Caste Elders and the Caste Council

The Balahis are in most aspects of public and private life governed by the Hindu civil and criminal code. Only in a few important points do they depart from traditional Hindu usage. They are not aware that they ever followed different laws and regulations. While other peoples, even primitive tribes, have old traditions about a law-giver who in most cases is identical with the ancestor of the tribe, the Balahis know of no such law-giver. They still remember the name of their ancestor, the mythical Haribans, and the circumstances of his birth, but they do not credit this founder of their caste with the regulation of their public and private life. They are often painfully reminded by the high Hindu castes that in some points, as for instance in beef-eating, they depart from Hindu law, but they do not know why this is so; whether these deviations are remnants of an older original Balahi code, or whether they have been introduced later in defiance to Hindu law. The Balahis still speak of a great Balahi leader, Ganga by name, who, if the genealogical registers are right, lived about eight hundred years ago. He is reputed to have made the Balahis a powerful caste by including in the community members of other and higher castes, and to have been the leader of the emigrant Balahis on their way southwards to the Nerbudda plains. But he does not appear to have introduced any new caste laws, on the contrary he imposed upon his new converts from other castes those customs which distinguish them from the Hindu high-castes: he made them drink liquor and eat beef before he allowed them to join the Balahi caste. In his time, obviously, the Balahis were already an untouchable Hindu caste.

The Balahi laws and customs<sup>29</sup>), as they are now observed by the Balahis, have been handed down from their ancestors to the present times by a continual succession of *jat-patels* (caste headmen) and *panchayats* (caste and village councils). These men, the rulers of the Balahi community, have to watch over the strict observance of the caste laws and traditions. They have to explain and to enforce these regulations in the *panch* meetings, and they are also authorized to punish any breach of these rules. The *panchayat* or *panch* (lit. 'the five', i.e. the council of five) presided over by the *jat-patel* is entirely and exclusively a caste organisation which has nothing to do with the political and civil administration by the government. It is a parallel organisation with its own laws and rules of procedure. And just as government officials generally ignore the existence of the caste *panchayats*, the latter with equal consistency dispense with the approbation and sanction of the government for their decisions.

The Balahi caste rules have, as a whole, never been codified and laid down in writing, but are passed on orally. In spite of the absence of written records there are scarcely ever any arguments about the right interpretation of the caste regulations, since all Balahis, and the caste elders in particular, are completely conversant with the legal traditions of their caste from the frequent explanation and public application of these rules in the *panch* meetings to which every adult Balahi is admitted.

## (2) The *jat-patel*

The head-men of the Balahi caste are called *jat-patel*. They are also called *mehar* (prince). But the latter title is now reserved for the *jat-patels* who are in charge of a whole district, the so-called main or *mukhya jat-patels*. In the Nimar District there are two such *mukhya jat-patels*, one residing at Roshnai near Khandwa, and the other at Mundi, near Bir. The *mukhya jat-patel* of the Khandwa division is at present Rukru, a *kotwal* of Roshnai. He is of the clan Kanerya which claims Rajput descent. His assistant, sometimes acting for him, is Padam, a Balahi of Chilla-talai, Khandwa. The main *jat-patel* of another Balahi caste division in the adjoining Holkar State lives at Khargone, about 50 miles west of Khandwa. The Khandwa division comprises all the Balahi village communities in the Khandwa tahsil and the adjoining parts of the Burhanpur and Harsud tahsils.

<sup>29</sup>) It should be emphasized that many of the details here recorded are not at all peculiar to the Balahis but are found among other castes as well. They are described here in order to present a full picture of the Balahis' public and private life.

The *mukhya jat-patel* or *mehtar* of Khandwa has full jurisdiction only in his own district, but his voice is heard and his orders are obeyed also in the adjoining districts of Mundi and Khargone. The *mehtar's* office is hereditary and, as a rule, passes after his death to his son. If a *mehtar* has no sons, a younger brother or nephew of his is elected by the *jat-patels* to succeed him.

The *mukhya jat-patel* presides over the *panchayat* meetings of a whole division. He is also called to decide in questions of major importance, and is appealed to when a Balahi believes that he has been wrongly judged by the ordinary *jat-patels*. In theory at least, the *mehtar* has also the right of nominating the ordinary *jat-patels* who act as his deputies and who are in charge of a certain number of Balahi village communities in his division. But nowadays it is practically the rule that also the ordinary *jat-patels* are succeeded by their sons or, if no sons at hand, by their younger brothers or nephews. Thus the *mukhya jat-patel* is only in exceptional cases in a position to nominate a candidate of his own choice. But even in such cases when a *jat-patel* dies without heirs the *mukhya jat-patel* is not quite free in his choice because the *jat-patels* of the adjacent districts claim the right of proposal of a candidate for the vacant post.

The Balahis do not know whether the office of *jat-patel* has always been hereditary or whether it has become so only lately. Whatever may be the case, it cannot be denied that succession by right of inheritance has done its part to diminish the authority of the *jat-patels*. For now it cannot be prevented that a candidate succeeds to the office who is unfit and unworthy of being a leader in the caste. Since the government does not support and enforce the authority of the caste leaders, the influence of the *jat-patels* depends mainly on their own personality, moral integrity, eloquence or wealth, with a backing by many and influential relatives. If these conditions are not fulfilled the authority of the caste leaders is bound to suffer.

The installation of a new *jat-patel* takes place in the village of the candidate. The *jat-patels* of the adjacent districts assemble and tie a new *pagri* (turban) around his head as a sign of his new dignity. The new *jat-patel* then gives a banquet to his colleagues and to his fellow villagers. It may cost about Rs. 20 or more, according to his means.

A *jat-patel* generally retains his office for life. However, if his conduct gives cause for censure, he may be warned to mend his ways; if he does not heed the warning he can be deposed by the *panch*. A lasting sickness which makes him unfit for the fulfilment of his duties can also be a reason for resignation. If a *jat-patel* is only temporarily prevented from the exercise of his office, a relative

of his can act for him. A *jat-patel* who breaks the caste rules may be expelled from the caste like any other Balahi. During the period of excommunication he is barred from acting as a *jat-patel*, but as soon as he has been reconciled he automatically resumes his office.

It is the task of a *jat-patel* to preside over caste meetings in which Balahi affairs are discussed, or in which a member of the caste is either outcasted or readmitted by the *panch*. No purification ceremony (*sarni*) can be performed without a *jat-patel*; a house or well which has been polluted must be purified by him. But nowadays this is about all that a *jat-patel* has to do. Upon the public life of their caste fellows the *jat-patels* have at present little real influence. The Balahis are generally more dependent on the higher castes, on their land-lords and employers who give them work and bread and to whom they look up as their masters and models. Further, not even the Balahis have remained impervious to the modern wave of sophistication: they too feel that their caste laws are often meaningless and obsolete, and begin to break them with impunity. *Jat-patels* complain that nowadays they are not even called to direct the ceremonies of a purification! People are saying: "The *jat-patel* demands a fee for drinking our liquor. We can do the same without paying any fee!"

### (3) The *panchayat*

The public affairs of a Balahi village community are managed by a communal body, called *panch* or *panchayat*. It is exclusively a caste institution and, as mentioned before, has nothing to do with the political administration of a village.

The current affairs of the caste community in a village are settled by a council of four or five elders (*panch*) elected by the adult male population of a village. Their authority is based on personal ability (an important element of which is eloquence), wealth, or a backing by influential relatives. The elders are elected for life and only displaced for grave reasons. There is an office of honour without pay. If the elders cannot come to a decision, or if issues of more importance are at stake, the whole adult male population of a Balahi village community is summoned to a meeting. In a full village caste council every male Balahi domiciled in the village has vote and voice, and can freely express his opinion or move a proposition. Affairs which involve the interests of members of another village community (such as divorce or marriage transactions), or which concern the caste as a whole (such as reception or resumption of a person into the caste), are settled by the members of a combined *panchayat* of the villages concerned, often presided over by a *jat-patel*. In exceptional cases, the *panch*-members of the

whole district may be called together for the issue of general laws or the abolition of existing caste rules.

The village *panchayat* exercises jurisdiction in affairs which concern the Balahi community as such. It discusses and decides, for instance, the sinking of a well, the building of a *mandir* (shrine of a god), or *dharmshala* (rest-house), the acquisition or disposal of common caste property. It takes part and influences the arrangement of a betrothal, witnesses and attends the celebration of a marriage or funeral feast.

The village *panch* has also regulative and disciplinary powers. It enforces and watches over the observance of the caste rules and punishes offenders of the caste laws. The village *panch* settles also all kinds of disputes and quarrels. But also slanders and calumnies, petty thefts, cheating, failure to pay debts, disputes over the bride-price, divorce, all these cases fall under the jurisdiction of the *panch*. The assistance of the police or administrative officials is generally not wanted, and is asked for only when the village council is unable to handle a case to the satisfaction of either the appellants or the defendants, or if the officials themselves interfere.

The *panch* has authority to impose punishment extending from a small fine to expulsion from the caste. In exceptional cases the accused may even be condemned to a beating or to other kinds of disgrace, for instance, shaving off of half of his hair and moustache and leading him around in the village while lookers-on abuse and revile him (or her).

Expulsion from the caste community or even from the village is indeed a hard punishment and, if observed rigorously, causes the outcast great inconvenience; it consists in a ban from communal life, forbids commensality, the use of the common well, and all the other privileges of a caste member. Since the Balahis are, on account of their low social and bad economical status, frequently in need of one another's help and co-operation, such a punishment is a very serious thing. Balahis are, moreover, in general a very social and affable people. Isolation from their fellow villagers and a ban from participation in communal life will soon break even the most obstinate spirit.

The outcast cannot avoid submission by flight to another village: he will be treated as an outcast in all Balahi villages wherever he goes. As soon as his position is recognised — and news travels fast in this country — even his best friends and nearest relatives are compelled to abandon him. For whoever defies the caste rules by sheltering an outcast shares his fate. These rules are in fact sometimes hard on an individual, but it must be remembered that the Balahis are ever ready to forgive and to forget, as soon as the culprit shows signs

of repentance and submits to the judgement of the *panch*. It is solely his obstinacy which makes a man remain outside his caste for any longer period. Even for the greatest crime which a Balahi may commit, the killing of a cow, the "*hatyar*" (murderer) is condemned to only one month of expulsion from the village and performance of the purification ceremony (*sarni*)<sup>30</sup>.

Once I attended such a *panchayat* meeting at a village 20 miles east of Khandwa. A case of adultery was to be handled by the *panch*. A Balahi had fallen in love with a Balahi woman, middle aged, married, the mother of ten children. The lover had bribed her husband, Ramsingh by name, to permit his illegal relations with the latter's wife in silence. Of course, the frequent visits of the lover soon attracted the attention of the whole village and gave cause for scandal, but the *panch* could not interfere as long as the weak husband of the woman kept his peace. Matters went so far that the lover left his own house and family and shifted with all his personal belongings to Ramsingh's house where he took up his permanent residence as the "housefriend". While his own wife and children starved, the love-mad man presented his beloved with his wife's jewels and his own savings.

The Balahis of the village did not at all like this love-affair going on before their eyes and tried to persuade Ramsingh to denounce the lover of his wife before the *panch*. For a long time the man resisted, heavily bribed by the lover. When, however, the money was spent and no further presents were forth-coming, Ramsingh got ready to act. He informed the head-man of the *panch* of his intention, to accuse the lover of his wife before the *panch* and to make an end to the public scandal.

One evening the whole male population of the Balahi *awar* (settlement), more than fifty men, assembled to attend the meeting. The women and children who were not permitted to show themselves at the *panch* hid behind walls and fencings in the darkness, all listening attentively. When all the men had arrived, the accused was called by the *panch* elders. The meeting was opened by the headman who made some announcements, settled some minor difficulties before he came to the main issue of the evening.

First the head-man informed the assembled community that Ramsingh had called a *panch* meeting. He then asked with a certain degree of solemnity: "Ramsingh, why did you call together the *panch*? State your case freely and do not hide anything. Remember, that this is the *panch*, and where there is the *panch*, there is Bhagwan (God)." Ramsingh accused in simple words his "house-friend" of

<sup>30</sup>) Cf. page 45 ff.

having illegal relations with his wife. The younger men chuckled and pinched each other, but were sternly rebuked by the elders. Then the accused was asked to vindicate himself. He roundly denied everything. Some men got up with a shout and abused him for his bold lying. But the accused kept cool and demanded proofs for the accusations. Ramsingh's wife was summoned. She too denied everything and complained that she was the innocent victim of a hideous calumny.

A loud discussion ensued, the excitement grew. It was a pleasure to watch these simple villagers talk. In the cool, calm, starlit night every sound could be heard; the men spoke with an eloquence and volubility, with a variety of superb gestures and suggestive change of voice, now pleading and imploring, then stern and firm, all of a sudden sarcastic and ironical, so that I could not but admire their oratorical talents. The assembled community responded splendidly to this down-pour of words. Some took the part of the accused, others that of the appellant. Many spoke at the same time without listening to what the others said. Some intervened and tried to calm the excited speakers, but failed and after fruitless endeavours to pacify the others, got angry themselves and started shouting louder than the rest. Several men got up and threatened to beat their opponents, but were held back by their own friends and severely reprimanded by the *panch* elders. Then the whole crowd dissolved into several groups, discussing the case among themselves. In the meanwhile the *panch* elders remained calm and cool and let the others talk. Only when the discussion became too heated and the curses too passionate, did they intervene and impose silence.

After a while the *panch* elders again took the matter in hand. The most remarkable thing was that they questioned the accused with great delicacy and discretion. To save his "face", the word "adultery" was never mentioned, the matter was circumscribed in such a way that everybody understood perfectly well without an outright accusation. At last the spokesman summed up the result of the whole discussion and stated that there were no eye-witnesses who could or would prove that the accused was guilty of adultery. However, his frequent visits and his stay, at last, in the house of Ramsingh were extremely suspicious and gave cause for serious scandal. To avoid all misinterpretation the accused was requested to stay away in future from Ramsingh's house. That was all the *panch* demanded from him; if he complied with the judgement of the *panch*, no further action would be taken against him.

But now the fun started. The defendant demanded the repayment of all the money which he had "loaned" to Ramsingh. His account run up to Rs. 300/—. The *panch* gasped in wonder, for Rs. 300/—

is a big sum for a Balahi. Ramsingh calmly denied having ever received so much money from the accused. The latter, however, produced stamped papers which certified for small loans amounting to Rs. 60/—. Ramsingh was commanded by the *panch* to repay this debt then and there and thus to remove all pretexts for the accused to stay in his house. Ramsingh, of course, was unable to pay at once and had to borrow from friends who were anxious to settle the whole affair.

After payment had been made, the whole meeting dissolved. The younger men, however, were not content with the decision of the *panch* and grumbled that the *panch* elders had been too lenient in their judgement. They said that a poor fellow with no relatives to stand by him would have been punished severely for the same crime. But they were silenced by the *panch* elders and the friends of the defendant. So they went away muttering that they would keep a sharp look-out for the future and watch the accused day and night.

And a few days later the lover was again found with Ramsingh's wife in the house of a Katia Balahi. When the observers went and called the *panch* elders, the accused found time to sneak out of the house and to hide behind a hedge. But Ramsingh's wife was found in the house and there were sufficient witnesses who had observed the lovers together. At once the *panch* was summoned and the man expelled from the caste. All his denials and excuses were in vain, nobody would listen to him. The faithless woman, however, was not punished at all; for it was said that a fine would only have affected her husband, not her. Nor could she, in consideration of her many children some of whom were still small, be expelled from the caste.

The outcasted man went home, defiantly shrugging his shoulders. He ordered his wife to get things from the grocer and water from the well. But the Balahis called another meeting and stated that his wife and children should leave the outcast or they would share his fate. His wife who had been so ill-used by her infatuated husband and compelled to earn her bread for herself and her children left the unfaithful man and shifted to new lodgings. Since then the outcast lived alone in his hut, completely isolated, but closely watched. No one spoke with him, nothing was sold to him, nobody visited him. At last the man got sick. He wanted to go to Khandwa to the hospital, but nobody was ready to convey him there. Alone he lay in his hut, with nobody to nurse him. His wife had already left the village with her children.

At last the head-man of the *panch* approached his hut and, from the door, called the outcast's name. Groaning and moaning the sick man asked for a bullock-cart to take him to hospital. The headman

replied that nobody could help him until he promised to give in and to submit to the judgement of the *panch*. This the man would not promise. After a few days, however, when he was already past recovery, the outcast broke down, called the *panch* and asked for pardon. He died after a hard death-struggle, from sickness caused more by neglect and mental worry than from real illness.

Village gossip spread the rumour that the outcast had had the intention to elope with Ramsingh's wife. He had himself made his bullock-cart ready to go off and meet his sweetheart a few miles beyond the village, but a sudden weakness had overcome him and he had not been able to climb on his seat in the bullock-cart. He had with difficulty turned back to his hut where he sank down on his cot, never to rise again. Villagers also said they had observed Ramsingh's wife sneaking in a dark night into her lover's hut, robbing him of his last rupees while the man was lying helpless in his agony. As a matter of fact, a search after the outcast's death resulted in finding his box empty and many things missing; not a rupee could be found.

It is rare that excommunication from the caste results in such tragical consequences as just related, but as a rule no Balahi who dares to defy the judgement of a village *panch* and to stand up against public opinion finds life easy. Much depends on the elders of a village community. If they take a firm stand and show no weakness, even the most obstinate man will have to give in after some time. But now-a-days many Balahis complain that the general standard of Balahi morality has, as compared with former times, much deteriorated and that now even *panch* elders are open to partiality and take bribes. A wealthy man or a Balahi with many and influential relatives can with impunity defy all caste rules. Even if he is outcasted, after a short time the village *panch* will be appeased by a nominal fine and a cast dinner, while a poor man will be treated with the full severity of the law.

It often happens that a Balahi takes a wife of a lower caste or marries a woman related to him in forbidden degree. If the man is a so-called *garib admi* (poor man or simpleton), he will be forced to give up the woman and to dismiss her. But a man of wealth or with many relatives will simply pay a fine and give a caste dinner, and then the *panch* will allow him to keep his wife. In Bhamgarh, for instance, a Balahi eloped with the wife of his elder brother, a serious offence against the Balahi caste rules. After a while the man returned with his wife to the village. He was summoned before the *panch* which commanded him to dismiss the woman and to return her to his brother. But the man defied the order of the *panch* and refused to give up the woman. The man was outcasted. However,

his relatives still visit him, and a short time ago his grown-up son even came to stay with his out-casted father. He probably eats also with him though not yet openly. But since the village *panch* is powerless to force the outcast's submission, the man will probably be readmitted into the caste after some years, without being compelled to give up his brother's wife.

Failure of the *panch* elders to enforce a judgement and the increasing frequency of manifestly unjust or biased decisions, have considerably weakened the authority of the *panch* in many Balahi communities. In particular the younger generation is apt to question the authority of the *panch* and to make light of the old venerable caste laws. However, their criticism has not yet developed to open rebellion. What is happening in the present time is that the younger generation is quietly following new standards without much talking about it. Authority is ignored rather than challenged and breaches of the traditional laws are kept secret as far as possible.

However, this weakening of the authority of the *panchayat* is more apparent in villages near the towns and big market places of the district. In places less affected by the inroads of modern civilisation the Balahi *panch* still exercises its traditional power. Any tendency to individual freedom and independence is resented by the community and severely checked. It can also be noticed that in villages with only a few Balahi families the moral standard is higher and the general outlook of members of such small communities is more conservative, while in villages with a large Balahi community matters are different. The reason is that the higher castes who have a certain interest in keeping the Balahis down, can better control a small community than a big one which, on the strength of its numbers, is sometimes apt to revolt against the authority of the high caste people. In a small community, besides, the young generation can much better be restrained by their elders and these new-fangled ideas about individual freedom and independence can be smothered with greater ease.

The hold which the community still possesses over the individual Balahi, is best illustrated by the following instance which at the same time shows that energy and character of an individual sometimes get the better of the opposition of the community. At a village about 16 miles west of Khandwa, a Balahi youth had married a beautiful girl who was in love with another man. When her husband, forced upon her by her parents according to old custom, came to fetch her to his home, the girl went with him. But at the first opportunity she ran away and tried to join the man of her own choice, a young widower. However, she was caught by friends of her lawful husband and brought back to him. When she shortly afterwards absconded a second time, her husband realised that he

would not be able to retain her though she was soon caught again and returned to him. As soon as the lover of the young woman heard that her husband intended to divorce her, he sent a man to him and offered a fair price for the girl. In the course of the discussion that followed the angry husband blurted out that his wife had never once allowed him to sleep with her. When the other young men of the village heard of this unprecedented slight against one of their own community they considered it an insult to the whole village and decided to punish a girl so self-willed and independent. At night they assembled in the house of the young woman's husband and, before his eyes, one after another raped her. When the outrage became known in the village, the village *panch* was called together to punish the men. The culprits were sternly reprimanded and each man had to pay a fine of one and a quarter rupee.

As soon as the lover of the ill-used woman heard what had happened, he declared that now he did not want her anymore. But the Balahis who knew their man realised that this was only a pretext in order to reduce the bride-price which he had agreed to pay for the woman. The husband of the woman also remained firm and refused to bargain, well knowing that her lover would pay any amount of money to gain his sweet-heart. He was right. After some discussions the eager lover agreed to pay the full sum demanded and after payment carried her off happily. Thus the young woman, as pretty as high-spirited, and brave enough to defy the age-old traditions of the caste and the coercion of her community, at last attained her heart's desire, but only after a hard struggle and with very painful injuries.

Though caste law and tradition may sometimes, as in the case just related, appear as a tyrannical and despotic oppressor of human individuality and sacred personal rights, the authority of the *panch* and of the caste elders exercises, as a whole, a beneficent rule and is of great regulative value for the moral life of a community. For the old caste traditions present a relatively high moral standard, and insist on honesty, submission to the authorities, a simple life, and sexual integrity. How long things are going to remain as they have been for ages, cannot be said. There are strong indications that modern civilisation and the general trends of a new age in India will also affect the Balahis. The Balahis have always been eager to follow the lead of their high-caste masters and to imitate them for good and for evil<sup>21</sup>).

<sup>21</sup>) Cf. St. FUCHS: Changes in the Low Castes of Central India. In: New Review 1941, pp. 370—377 and: Changes and Developments in the Population of the Nimar District in the Central Provinces of India, Anthropos (Fribourg) XLI—XLIV, 1946—1949, pp. 49—68.

The village community, as a collective entity, has also its own collective property. The well, for instance, from which the Balahis draw their water, usually belongs to the whole village community. Since the Balahis, as untouchables, are not permitted to use the public wells of the high-caste people, they are except when there is a river conveniently near obliged to sink their own wells. The sinking of a well is generally the affair of a whole village community. At a *panch* meeting the decision is taken to dig a well. The headman of the *panch* is commissioned to collect the necessary capital, and every family is bound to pay their share at convenient rates. The headman arranges also the hours of work for each adult member of the caste. Whoever fails to pay his due or does not appear for work, is excluded from the use of the well after its completion.

Every village community of some size owns also the huge cooking vessels which are required for the caste banquets. Also musical instruments, such as drums, or the *sing* (a typical Balahi wind instrument) are frequently the common property of a village community. Such things are sometimes presented to the *panch* by a wealthy member of the caste, but more often the money required for the purchase must be collected from all the Balahi families of the village, or is the accumulated balance from fines paid by offenders of the caste rules. In rare cases, when the need is felt for the purchase of a certain article, a current caste dinner is dispensed with and the amount of money saved in this way is diverted for the purpose of buying the urgently wanted article.

The use of property is strictly limited to public affairs. Articles of common property are generally kept in the custody of the headman of the village. Their repair, sale, or any other form of disposal of them, is only permitted with the consent of the whole Balahi village community.

#### (4) General Caste Meetings

Meetings of Balahis from different villages for the discussion of more important questions are relatively rare. Such *panchayats* are expensive, as the delegates from other villages have to be entertained by the conveners of a caste meeting. But occasionally big funeral feasts or similar occasions bring together a large number of Balahis, sometimes several hundreds of them. At a wedding, however, the Balahis generally do not discuss communal affairs, for they hold that this time should be entirely free from disturbing quarrels and hot disputes. Caste meetings are indeed frequently the scenes of violent quarrels though it rarely comes to blows between opponents. Balahis are generally meek people, much averse to deeds of violence.

The occasion of a large gathering of caste fellows is often the best opportunity for dissatisfied adversaries to bring a dispute before a higher tribunal if a case cannot be settled by the village *panch*. Often the final decision is placed in the hands of arbitrators selected from a group of widely respected caste elders, and the litigant parties promise to submit to whatever the decision may be, when a final agreement is generally made in writing; the Balahis have much faith in a written document to which a stamp is affixed.

The Balahis still speak of a big *panchayat* meeting which was held on the 25th of April 1927 at Borgaon near Khandwa. Twenty-nine *jat-patels* and deputations from eighty villages assembled for a mammoth caste council. The *panchayat* was prompted by the following incident: A Balahi of Babli, a village south of Khandwa, was married to a girl of Pandhana, 12 miles south-west of Khandwa. On occasion of a certain feast the young woman returned to her parents' home for a visit, as is customary among the Balahis. When after a while the husband went to fetch her home, the woman refused to go with him. During her stay at home she had been seduced by a Mohammedan and she preferred to continue this connexion as a profitable source of income, besides the pleasure. Her husband, however, fully aware of this state of things, insisted on carrying his wife off. A quarrel resulted in which the parents of the girl took part against their son-in-law. Finally the girl's mother became so enraged that she took off her shoe and slapped the face of her son-in-law. Now the offence of being beaten with a shoe by a woman (who is, moreover, the mother-in-law) was so great a humiliation for the young man that he swore he would appeal to the highest caste authorities for his own rehabilitation and the punishment of the shameless woman who was his mother-in-law. The Balahis of Babli are very respectable people and not at all poor, else the young man would probably have taken another way to revenge himself.

The *panchayat* summoned by the man of Babli, took place at Borgaon and was presided upon by the *mukya jat-patels* of Khandwa and Borgaon. Investigations made by the caste-council proved that the whole Balahi community of Pandhana had a very bad reputation. Many Balahi women, married or widowed, had love affairs with Mohammedans and lived almost like prostitutes. They had also associated freely with castes lower than their own, and thus had impaired the social status of the whole Balahi caste. The *jat-patels* condemned the whole Pandhana Balahi community to expulsion from the caste and a fine of Rs. 250.

The Balahis of Pandhana at first decided to defy the judgement of their caste elders and to live on as before, but after three months

they realised that they would have to submit: excommunication from the caste proved too great a nuisance. They consequently declared their submission, paid the fine, promised to mend their ways and gave a big propitiatory banquet to which deputations from 80 villages (of the whole Nimar District) were invited. Three *mani* (almost a ton and a half) of *laddu* (wheat cakes, baked in ghi) were required for the caste dinner.

This gathering of several thousands of Balahis was considered very opportune for the discussion of many important problems and for the issue of new rules and regulations for the entire Balahi community of the Nimar District. The caste leaders of the Balahis had long since waited for such an opportunity to discuss a reform of the moral and social status of the community. It was clear that first of all the main causes of their degradation and ill reputation had to be eliminated. It was therefore decided that henceforth the Balahis should abstain from eating the meat of cattle and of water-buffaloes, and from collecting the remains (*jhutha*) of the meals of other castes. Offenders of these rules should be fined Rs. 24 to 30. It was also decided to make early marriages easier by reducing the amount of the bride-price (*dahej*). The price was fixed at from Rs. 20 to 24. For a widow the bride-price should remain between Rs. 150 to 200 as before. Any Balahi who demanded or paid a higher price for a girl or widow, should be punished by a fine of Rs. 30 (in case of a girl) or Rs. 41 (in case of a widow). A fine of Rs. 4 was imposed on any person who ate bread baked by an ordinary *bhatiyara* (inn-keeper), or a Mohammedan. A fine of Rs. 2/8 should be paid by a Balahi eating the bread of a *dhobi* (washerman).

All the *fat-patels* and deputies of the villages signed these resolutions and promised strict observance of the new regulations. For two years the Balahis of the Nimar really kept the new rules. Then the Balahis of Khandwa and Bhamgarh, two big market places, began once more to eat beef and *jutha*. In these big towns where lots of cattle die, and beef is sold cheaply by the (Mohammedan) butchers or even given away free of charge when condemned by the sanitary officer, the Balahis saw with distress the daily waste of so much "good meat". They could not afford to buy the expensive goat-meat (which is about three to four times more expensive than beef), nor suppress the strong craving for a meat diet. So they soon relapsed into their old habit of eating the meat of slaughtered or diseased cattle. First secretly, then more and more openly, they again took advantage of their old caste "privilege" of eating carrion and the remains of high-caste dinners. They first defied the Balahis of other villages who warned them; and then persuaded them also to join in

a meal at which beef or the remains of a dinner of other castes were served. Afraid of the tough and self-conceited Balahis of the towns, the rural Balahis could not refuse the invitation to such a meal when they came from other villages to Khandwa or Bhamgarh. Bullied or encouraged, as the case demanded, soon all the Balahis of the Nimar reverted to their old customs which degraded them so much in the eyes of the high-caste people. Only a very few villages and, in some villages only a few individual families, still refuse to eat carrion and *jhutha*. And at Pandhana women and girls too went back to their love-affairs with Mohammedan friends. Things grew from bad to worse.

Several further attempts have been made since, to call together another general caste meeting which would enforce the resolutions of the *panchayat* of the year 1927, for all realise that the rules introduced then were after all only for the benefit and the social uplift of the Balahi community. But the Balahis lack a strong caste authority which alone could enforce such laws.

## Chapter V

### Law and Justice: The Balahi Moral Code

According to the Balahi point of view the ideal of a good Balahi is a man who lives at peace with all the world, especially with his caste fellows; a man who is moderately wealthy, not too wealthy because wealth and riches spoil a man's heart and make him wicked and haughty; a man who has a good wife and a couple of healthy and obedient sons, so that he may live care-free and in leisure in his old age; a few girls, at home or already happily married, are a welcome addition to a man's fortune. The ideal of the Balahi is to be the head of a large family, supported and obeyed by his many sons and respected by his caste fellows. He must be a religious man, god-fearing and not too lax in observing the numerous Hindu fasts and feasts. He must desist from quarrelling with his caste fellows and neither harm them, nor desire their property or wives. He must pay his debts, at least those which he owes to his fellow Balahis, and pay his dues to the caste community on occasion of birth, marriage and funeral feasts, by giving the required number of banquets. If he fulfils all these conditions and, in addition, is clever and a good talker and has numerous and influential relatives in the villages near and far, he is the ideal Balahi.

For his moral conduct the Balahi is only slightly influenced by a sense of divine sanction. Moreover, he is ignorant of any definite system of moral precepts or a logical foundation of his rules of conduct. The great regulative power in his moral life is fear of

public opinion and an eventual punishment by his caste community. He consequently rarely avoids evil from the mere fear of divine punishment or performs a virtuous act in the hope of divine reward. A Balahi when asked what a good deed is that would merit a reward in after-life thought a bit and then said: "One should strew sugar for ants". However, the Balahi is far from denying a divine sanction and at times of misfortune, of epidemics and sickness or death of a relative, this belief finds sometimes emphatic expression. Balahi women indeed often accuse Bhagwan of cruelty in their dirges and sing: "What have I done that my husband (or child) must die? Have I murdered anybody? Have I been a thief? Why do you punish me so severely?" At another time when cholera was raging in the country and many people died, several Balahis expressed their conviction that this terrible disease was a punishment of Bhagwan for the impiety of the modern generation. They admitted that at times of epidemics many people turn to Bhagwan and pay homage to him, having invoked in vain the minor deities, the *deos* and *matas*.

The Balahi believes that God is the judge of good and evil: "*Bhagwan ayan log nakha ayan rakhega, bura log nakha kharab jaga dise* — God places the righteous in a good place, the bad ones in a bad place." But it appears that this conviction is not very firmly rooted, for every Balahi, even one who is anything but a model of virtue, is sure of going to Bhagwan's place. Only for a very grave act of immorality the Balahis expect a punishment in the life after death. Ordinary sins and short-comings, so they say, are punished by the gods in this life. Only a *hatyar* (lit. murderer, but generally any one who must perform the *sarni* ceremony as a penalty for his crime), or an uncorrigibly bad man, is punished by Bhagwan in the other world. He is cast into a huge iron vessel full to the brim with muddy water, blood and puss. There the soul is tormented by innumerable worms. Four servants of Dhud Raja, the judge of the dead, watch the vessel of torment so the soul may not escape. But after a while Bhagwan forgives the sins and the soul is reborn in another Balahi child.

Though this belief in reward and punishment after death is fairly common, in its details it is rather vague and uncertain. The Balahis apparently have no firm belief in *karma* and rebirth, though they are of the opinion that ordinary people are reborn as Balahis, while only souls with no moral defects whatever go straight to Bhagwan to stay with him in eternal bliss and happiness. But very wicked souls are punished with ever-lasting or, at least, long-lasting pain. The same belief in partial rebirth of the dead is shared by many other tribes and castes of the country.

As mentioned before, the conviction of a divine sanction for a good or bad life does not seriously influence the Balahis. The pangs of a bad conscience, although they may be felt occasionally, do not bother them for long, at least not for as long as nobody knows about the misdeed and thus reputation has not suffered. Old people, however, may sometimes speak with regret of the sins of their past life and repent them, and even take pains to expiate them in some way. But, unless his good name is involved, the average Balahi does not take minor offences of the moral code too seriously. At least in judging their own deeds the Balahis are rather lenient and partial, and well able to excuse their own actions by pretending the most innocent motives and best intentions. However, in judging the actions of others they appear to have the most definite ideas of what is right or wrong; and when they themselves have been wronged, they are capable of subtle distinctions which they discuss with an astonishing precision and great eloquence.

So, although the conscience of the average Balahi is not very tender, he has a wholesome fear of public opinion and the authority of the caste council. This fear and the force of habit and tradition keep many a Balahi on the straight path when other motives fail. This is perhaps the reason why a Balahi so soon loses his moral balance when separated from his community, or when he becomes independent. The average Balahi does not inquire into the why and wherefore of a certain moral law or custom, it is sufficient for him to know that public opinion and the tradition of his fore-fathers approve of or condemn it. But as soon as this outward control ceases to act his moral sense begins to fail.

#### (1) Offences Punished by Expulsion from the Caste

A Balahi is expelled from his caste for killing a man, or a cow, or a bullock; a dog, cat, jackal, squirrel, horse, or mongoose; for committing incest; for being beaten by a sweeper, Mang, Fermal, or Dhobi.

The killing of a man, cow, or bullock, or of a dog, is the greatest crime possible for a Balahi. It is called *hatya* — murder. A *hatya-wala* is expelled not only from the village community and from companionship with caste fellows, but even from the locality where he lives. For a certain period (15 to 35 days) he must not show his face to anybody but has to live with the cattle. During this time he must fill his stomach with whatever he can find in the fields or in the jungle, unless his relatives give him something to eat in a barn, where he sleeps at night. He may be supplied with wheat-bread only, since he is not allowed to eat *joari* bread, nor *dal*

(pulse), rice or salt. Care is taken that the outcast's meal is placed for him in his absence, as his presence is polluting. The Balahis believe that by meeting such a man face to face, one would certainly call down great misfortune upon oneself and one's own family. Whatever the delinquent touches becomes unclean. He should not touch nor use anything which man considers necessary for a human being. He is an outcast, a person devoid of human dignity, and should therefore associate only with the dumb animals and live like them.

After the period of separation is over the *nai* (barber) summons all the caste fellows of the village to a meeting. There the question is brought up, how to proceed against the culprit, and to fix the conditions for his reconciliation to the caste. In the case of interference of the police, the punishment of the delinquent by the caste authorities is postponed until his release from jail. But in cases which are not prosecuted by the government authorities, as for instance the killing of a dog, the judgement of the *panch* takes place at once after the period of separation has come to a close. The *jat-patel* or another prominent man of the village community states what the law of the caste demands in such a case and perhaps relates what procedure had been taken in the past in similar cases that have come to his knowledge. After some discussion of the details the *panch* will decide upon the kind of punishment, and sentence will be passed.

After the verdict has been pronounced, the delinquent is asked whether he accepts the penalty and submits to the sentence. However, before he is allowed to associate again with his caste fellows, a rather complicated ritual of readmission into the caste must be performed. This ritual is called *sarni*. *Sarni* is also a practice of other Hindu castes from whom the Balahis obviously have adopted it.

The first phase of the ritual is that the penitent goes on a pilgrimage to a sacred shrine on the Nerbudda or Tapti river. "In Central India this river (the Nerbudda) is held to be far more sacred than any other stream in India ... A mere sight of the Nerbudda is equivalent to a bath in the Ganges, and such are its virtues that all wells and tanks within 30 miles from its banks are endowed with powers of purification equal to those of the great river itself" <sup>32</sup>).

On this pilgrimage the penitent is accompanied by the *nai*. At the river bank near the shrine the delinquent undresses and takes a bath. The *nai* shaves his whole body. After another bath, the man dresses in other worn clothes, while the clothes in which he arrived

<sup>32</sup>) L. C. DHARIWAL: The Indore State Gazetteer vol. I, p. 10, Indore 1931.

are thrown away as unclean. After the bath of purification the pilgrim gives alms to the priests of the shrine, or even a banquet. After that, the penitent and the *nai* return to their village. On their arrival at home the village council is summoned. Both men are regarded as unclean, the delinquent for his misdeed, the *nai* for having touched him during the shave. Therefore both men are ordered to sit a little apart from the crowd. The bath in the sacred river has been more of a religious nature, while now the reconciliation to the community is about to take place.

The *jat-patel* who has been called to preside over the council opens the court. First of all he orders the penitent to pay his fine. After the man has paid in cash, the *nai* asks to be readmitted. He makes an offering of country liquor, *gur* and gram, to the *jat-patel*. The expenses for his purification, of course, must be borne by the delinquent. The *jat-patel* and, after him, the other members of the village *panch* drink with the *nai* of the liquor and eat of the *gur* and gram. With that the *nai* is restored to the community.

Now the delinquent has once more to take a bath. The clothes which he has worn since his bath in the sacred river, are thrown away and, after the bath, he dresses in new clothes. Then he is expected to give a caste dinner to his fellow villagers, more or less expensive in accordance with his means and the gravity of his misdeed. Before the meal starts, the *jat-patel* drinks a glass of liquor. After having emptied the glass, the *nai* fills it again and the *jat-patel* now offers it to the penitent who drinks. Then the *jat-patel* sits down with the delinquent and both are served by the *nai*, while all the other people hold back. After a short time, when they see that nobody raises any objection to the *jat-patel* eating from the same plate as the delinquent, they too sit down and partake of the meal. With this meal the whole case is settled and the delinquent is purified and reconciled to the caste community.

However, the whole procedure does not always take quite such a smooth course. Often there is a little trouble over the payment of the fine, either that the required cash is not available at the moment, or some members of the *panch* think that the fine is either excessive or too slight. For such or other reasons a part of the village community may refuse to eat with the outcast till all their demands are fulfilled. If the *jat-patel* has been too hasty and has already started to drink and to eat with the outcast, he too may be expelled from the caste. Sometimes a whole village is made outcast, if other Balahi communities object to the unlawful or irregular handling of the caste regulations by a certain village *panch*. In such a case it is usual to appeal to the higher authority of the *mukhya jat-patel*, or to a council composed of several caste leaders. Naturally such an

appeal involves the appellants in heavy expenses since the members of the caste council expect to be entertained by the appellants during the time of their sitting. However, they do not demand payment for the time of their conference.

The *sarni* ceremony, as such, is a very expensive affair. The *nai* and the *jat-patel* demand a relatively high fee (up to Rs. 30) because of the risks they run in dealing with the outcast; then the pilgrimage to the sacred river, often combined with a banquet for the Brahmans and Sadhus of the shrine, the fine demanded by the village *panch*, and lastly the final caste dinner — all this costs a fair amount of money.

The killing of a cat, a squirrel, a mongoose, a horse, or a jackal, is also punished with expulsion from the caste. But the fine imposed is not so heavy, and the resumption into the caste is not as expensive and intricate as a *sarni* purification, nor is the delinquent required to leave the village for a certain period. He is only forbidden to take part in public caste affairs and is considered unclean. But as soon as he has paid his fine to the *panch*, he is reconciled to the caste community by the *jat-patel* during a caste banquet for which, naturally, he has to pay the expenses.

In all these cases no regard is taken whether the offence against the caste laws has been committed with intent or only by accident. A "murder" in cold blood or an accident resulting in the death of a man, or of one of the above mentioned animals, requires the performance of the same purification ceremony, though the amount of the fine demanded by the caste council may vary according to the guilt of the offender.

However, while formerly the enforcement of these laws was more rigid and mechanical, in recent times a certain degree of elasticity has been allowed in the interpretation of the caste laws. Thus, formerly, a man was expelled from the caste community and punished by the whole strength of the law, even if he had been only indirectly the cause of a man's or animal's death. A man was held responsible for a cow's death, for instance, if the animal died in his cattle shed whether the cause of the animal's death had been a snake bite, or any other accident. The man who had tied the cow to the post at which it subsequently died was punished as a *hatyar*. Or if a young bullock died during or shortly after castration or the piercing of the nose, the operators were punished with expulsion from the caste. The same happened when a Balahi sold cattle to a butcher. Even the killing of a mad dog or jackal was punished with equal severity.

Now-a-days the Balahis no more punish the killing of a mad dog or jackal; the sale of cattle to the butcher is expiated by a

nominal fine of one and a quarter rupee and a glass of liquor for the *jat-patel*. The man who has tied an animal to a post in the cattle-shed at which it subsequently is found dead, is now generally not punished at all; the *jat-patel* is only called in for the purification of the house or cattle-shed where the accident occurred. Instead of a caste dinner some sweets are distributed among the children of the village.

If the delinquent is still an unmarried boy or girl, he (or she) is not compelled to perform the *sarni* ceremony for any offence of the caste rules. Children are not regarded as fully responsible for what they do. Only the *jat-patel* is called to purify the child and the place where the unhappy event took place, no other punishment is inflicted upon the child. One exception, however, is made: If a child gets worms in its wounds, it is considered unclean as are also all persons who touch it. After the wounds have healed, the family must pay a fine and give a banquet to the village community before they are re-admitted to the caste. The Balahis do not know exactly the reasons for this strange rule. It seems that it has been adopted from the aboriginal tribes of the country who punish this kind of illness with expulsion from the caste because they believe that it is a special punishment of Bhagwan for the sin of incest committed either in this life or in a former birth. Whatever may be the origin of this custom, at present most Hindu castes of the country observe it.

Crimes whose perpetration require a certain amount of courage and boldness are rare among the Balahis. For they are a timid people; they may be quarrelsome, boastful, deceitful, but even over their worst quarrels they seldom come to blows. Man-slaughter and other crimes of violence, therefore, are not often committed by Balahis. But they are not adverse to doing away with an enemy if it can be done in a stealthy way without much chance of detection. Homicide committed with dacoity is extremely rare, but murder by poisoning is relatively frequent among the Balahis.

During my ten years among the Balahis I have heard of only one murder which was committed with some show of courage. The circumstances of the crime were as follows: Some twenty years ago the *kotwal* of Khapri, a village near Pandhana, had planted a number of Mango trees in the field of his *malguzar* (land-lord). According to the custom of the country such trees belong to the planter though they may grow in a place which is not his property. Field-owners, naturally, do not like in their fields trees which belong to somebody else, and, except as rewards for some service done, rarely give permission to an outsider for planting such trees. Whatever may have been the case, the *kotwal* had got permission from the *malguzar* to plant the trees. But when the trees had grown up

and bore their first fruits, the land-lord prevented the *kotwal* from plucking the fruits. He asserted his right over the trees which stood upon his field. When the *kotwal* tried to reason with his land-lord, the latter cut him short by demanding proofs in writing that the trees really belonged to him. The *kotwal* could not provide any document nor, for fear of the land-lord, could he find anybody ready to stand witness for him. Every year when the mangoes ripened the *kotwal* again demanded his right and the *malguzar* refused him permission to pluck the fruits. At last the Balahi was ready for a compromise and offered to renounce his claim on half the trees if the land-lord conceded him property rights on the rest. But the *malguzar* was adamant: "Not a single fruit shall ever be yours! The trees are mine!"

The Balahi went away, swearing revenge. He found four of his relatives ready to help him in carrying out his evil designs. One day when they heard that the land-lord intended a journey to Khandwa, they went ahead and at a lonely spot waited for their victim. When the land-lord came alongside on his bullock-cart, they held up his cart, and the *kotwal* with a heavy blow of his stick shattered the skull of his enemy. The companions of the murderer loosened the bullocks and then all disappeared in the jungle. The bullocks ran home. When they arrived at Khapri without cart and master, the land-lord's relatives at once suspected foul play. They sent out a search-party and after some time the dead body of the *malguzar* was found lying in a pool of blood. Suspicion fell at once upon the *kotwal* and his relatives who had absconded since the night of the murder. The police tried hard to arrest the murderers but for a long time they were unsuccessful.

After several weeks a Gujar, in a village near Burhanpur, observed four men creeping stealthily behind a barn. Suspecting thieves he went after the men in the darkness and overheard them discussing the murder of the *malguzar* of Khapri. He at once surmised that the fugitives were involved in the crime; without disturbing them he sent for the police. When the policemen came they cautiously surrounded the barn where the fugitives were hiding. Without a struggle the *kotwal* and his accomplices surrendered and were arrested. But when it came to the trial of the murder, the nephew of the *kotwal*, an unmarried youth, took the blame upon himself. He wanted to save the real murderer who had a large family. He accordingly confessed that he had killed the *malguzar* by a heavy blow of his stick, while his accomplices, so he said, had run away having lost heart at the last moment. The young man could not be brought to change his confession and as his accomplices confirmed his statement, and admitted that they had tried to prevent him from

committing the murder, the young man was condemned to hang while the others were acquitted for lack of evidence. Fellow villagers, however, maintained that in fact the *kotwal* had killed the *malguzar*, while his nephew admitted the crime to save him.

The Balahis who related the story to me found nothing strange in the behaviour of the young man. They admitted that somebody had to pay the penalty for the crime, but they did not mind it at all that the wrong man was hanged. They found it quite in order that the *kotwal* was acquitted, since his family would have suffered had he been condemned.

In a village of about fifty Balahi families I heard of two attempts of poisoning within a period of two years. In both cases a young woman tried to get rid of her husband. In one case a young widow had been married by her relatives to an elderly man who had a half-grown daughter at home. The man treated his wife well but she seemed to dislike him. When after a while she had a quarrel with her step-daughter, the woman decided to get rid of both husband and daughter. She obtained poison from the mid-wife of the village, a woman who is said to have been helpful in several such cases before. The poison appears to have been *datura* (*Stramonium*), the poisonous seed of a narcotic weed of the *Solanaceae* (night-shade) family. The seed, administered in quantity, is a fatal poison, but taken in small doses it weakens the will and confuses the mind. People drugged by this poison behave as though they were mad; they become giddy and insensible, and lose their mental balance though they retain command of their body. One evening the young woman mixed the *datura* seeds into the food of her husband and step-daughter. The poison was not strong enough to have a fatal result, the drugged persons survived but were unconscious and delirious for days. The man talked like a lunatic and one day left the village and wandered aimlessly about till the after-effects of the poison wore off. Then he returned to the village, maintaining that he knew nothing of what he had said and done during the time of his illness. His daughter had been kept in the house during her illness; as soon as she had recovered a little, she was sent to relatives of her dead mother. Though the man knew that his wife had tried to poison him, he did not make a report to the police or to the caste *panchayat*. Since he was a poor man, he could not afford to divorce her, for he lacked the money with which to acquire another wife. He did not even punish his wife for fear of her many influential relatives in the village. The young woman herself obviously had not thought of the possible consequences of her crime and seemed rather relieved when her husband recovered. After some time the relations between hus-

band and wife improved and when a boy was born there was no more quarreling and wife-beating.

About a year after this poison case, another newly-married man of the village got violently sick one day shortly after his dinner. The relatives of the young man at once suspected his wife of having mixed poison with the food, but when they called her, she had disappeared. The sick man was given soap-water to drink after which he vomited. This obviously expelled the poison from his stomach, for the drugged man got soon better and after a few days had recovered completely. Enquiries were made into the whereabouts of the young wife and it was found that she had returned to her parents. After a few weeks her father-in-law went to fetch her home. In this case too the young woman was not punished at all nor was a report made to the police. Again as the young woman confessed it had been the mid-wife of the village who had supplied the poison. But not even the mid-wife was molested in any way, for, as the villagers argued, after all, no harm had been done.

There is a strong tendency to hide everything as much as possible from the police. First of all, people believe that the village *panch* is competent to punish such breaches of the law; then, the villagers are rather reluctant to invite the police into the village, they usually disturb the peace of the whole village and are often expensive guests, expecting free meals and presents from the villagers. Nor are village people at all sure of getting their rights in court; they find the proceedings of a court case bewildering and often do not at all agree with the judgement delivered after endless questioning and repeated calls to court.

One murder, committed by a Balahi about fifteen years ago (in 1934), is remarkable for the circumstances in which it happened. — Lalchand, a field-servant with a withered leg, living at Sirpur, 20 miles east of Khandwa, had a son about ten years of age. In 1934 the boy suddenly got sick and soon died. When Lalchand's father, a leper in an advanced stage of the disease, heard of his grand-son's death, he decided to visit his son and to attend the funeral feast, usually celebrated ten days after a person's death. Being desperately poor, the old sick man could not afford to hire a bullock-cart, but decided to walk the distance of 30 miles between Sirpur and his own village. Together with his old wife, he slowly walked on till he reached Bhamgarh, about ten miles from Sirpur. There he broke down. He sat down under a tree and asked his wife to go ahead and to inform Lalchand of his predicament.

When the old woman arrived at Sirpur, her son did not receive her very kindly. He rudely refused to arrange for a bullock-cart to fetch his father. But fellow villagers intervened and asked him to

have pity on the old man, while Lalchand's employer loaned him a pair of bullocks and a cart. Lalchand found his father lying by the way-side in the shade of a tree and in a not too friendly tone told him to get on the bullock-cart. He reproached him rudely for making all this bother and informed him that no funeral feast would take place, as he had no money to feed the villagers.

About one mile from Bhamgarh, the road drops steeply to a fairly big river, the Bham. Although a fine stone bridge leads over the river, it is dangerous to cross it in the rainy season because the railings of the bridge are removed in the beginning of the monsoon to forestall their destruction in case the river rises and flows over the bridge.

Here Lalchand, as he is said to have confessed to some friends, hurled his father from the bridge into the river. He returned to Sirpur with the empty cart and said that the bullocks had shied and thrown his father into the flooded river. The police made investigations, but for lack of evidence and because Lalchand too was a leper, they did not even arrest him. It was impossible to find out what had really happened and whether Lalchand had indeed killed his father. But his fellow villagers certainly believed him to be the murderer of his father. Since they could prove nothing, the man was not outcasted, but he was so shunned and scorned by all the people that he soon left the village. His wife left him and married another man. Limping and heavily leaning on his cane, the unfortunate man wandered from village to village and begged his bread. After several years he returned one evening to his wretched hut, the next morning people found him lying on the floor — dead! The Balahis got a bullock-cart, a relative of the dead man lifted his corpse with all his clothing and bedding on to the cart, and the Balahis drove him to the jungle where they exposed the body near a river. No funeral ceremonies whatsoever were performed.

## (2) Pollution from Unclean Animals

The Balahis regard as unclean the dead body of a dog, a cat, a mongoose, a donkey, a horse, and a squirrel. Balahis never touch even a live donkey, and usually avoid touching a live cat or dog; only children occasionally play with dogs and cats, or with their puppies or kittens. Hindus regard dogs and cats as sacred animals, the former being associated with Khandoba, a warrior incarnation of Mahadeo, while the cat is the pet animal of Sita, the wife of Rama. But the real reason why dogs and cats should not be killed is obviously their usefulness in destroying vermin. The same probably holds good for the mongoose. The squirrels are particularly sacred

to the Balahis; why that is so they do not know. Hindus hold them sacred because the god Krishna loved them. Or because the monkey-god Hanuman took the guise of a squirrel, on his journey to Lanka exploring the whereabouts of Rama's wife Sita. The donkey is an unclean animal, probably, because he is employed by members of unclean castes. There is no apparent reason why the dead body of a horse should be polluting; Mahars are allowed to remove a dead horse, but Balahis would be outcasted for doing so. The latter are not even permitted to loosen the rope by which the horse was tied to the peg before it died.

If a dog, cat, mongoose, or squirrel, die in a house, the people who occupy the house are all regarded as unclean and must be purified. But they are not permitted to remove the body from the house. A Mehtar (sweeper) must be called for its removal. While the high-caste Hindus generally do not allow the Mehtar to enter their houses and themselves bring the dead body to the door where the Mehtar takes it, the Balahis allow the Mehtar to enter and to remove the body himself. But the house and its occupants are regarded as unclean. All cooked food is thrown away, and the house is smeared with fresh cow-dung. So much is also customary among the other Hindu-castes; but the Balahis feel that this is not enough: they throw away all the earthen pots in the house and the flour that had been stored in the room where the animal died. The occupants of the house must take a bath, and wash their clothes, as well as all the brass vessels and other cooking utensils in the house. If a house is partitioned off into several separate rooms each of them occupied by a different family, Hindus of other castes feel content if the room is purified where the animal has actually died. But the Balahis are much stricter; for them all the rooms under a common roof are polluted, if such an animal has died anywhere in the building<sup>23</sup>).

After this preliminary cleaning the *jat-patel* is summoned. He sprinkles liquor all over the rooms of the house and throws gram (*channa*) into all corners. Then he sits down on the very spot where the animal died and there begins to eat and to drink. After this meal the house is purified, but the family must give a banquet to the village community, or at least distribute sweets among the children. The *jat-patel* receives one and a quarter rupees as his fee, the sweeper who removed the dead body also gets a rupee and a quarter, and in addition two *chauki* (16 pounds) of grain.

If one of the above-mentioned unclean animals dies on the veranda of the house or in the court-yard, no fine is imposed, but the

<sup>23</sup> Cf. St. FUCHS: The Nimar Sweepers, in: The New Review 1944, vol. XX, p. 67.

sweeper must be called for the removal of the body. If a horse dies in the stable or court-yard, no Balahi may touch it. Members of a caste which allows to touch a dead horse, Mahars for instance, are called to remove the body. But if a bullock or cow dies in the village, not the sweeper but the Balahi removes the body to a spot outside the village. It is the privilege of the *kotwal*, village watchman, to skin the body. Afterwards all the Balahis of the village are free to cut off as much meat as they want. Though the killing of cattle is so severely punished, the eating of beef is permitted.

If a cart wheel rolls over the dead body of an unclean animal, and pieces of flesh, drops of blood, etc. stick to the cart wheel, the driver of the cart is outcasted. If no traces are found on the cart, no action is taken against the driver. If a Balahi only touches such an unclean body, he is polluted and must call the *jat-patel* to eat and to drink with him. The *jat-patel* receives his fee of one and a quarter rupees, but in addition a caste dinner must be given to the fellow villagers. Only in a case of extreme poverty are the Balahis satisfied if the polluted man distributes sweets among the children of the village.

If a man or cattle is drowned in a well, the body is removed. The flesh of the drowned bullock or cow may be eaten, but the water of the well may not be used! If an unclean animal falls into a well and is drowned, the well may be used as long as the body is out of sight. But as soon as the body is found in the water, the well is polluted and the Mehtar must be called to remove the body. Then for five weeks no one may draw water from the well. Meanwhile the Balahis of the village collect grain and money from each family for a caste dinner on the day of purification.

For the performance of the purification ceremony a *jat-patel* is summoned. If possible all the water, or at least 50 to 60 buckets of water are drawn from the well and poured away. Then the *jat-patel* pours a few drops of liquor into the well and some grains of gram. Water is brought from another well and poured into the polluted well. After that a bucket of water is drawn from the polluted well and poured into all the Balahi wells of the village, as a sign that the well is again as clean as any other well in the village. If the precautions of pouring water from the well into the other wells were not taken, some mischievous people might refuse for certain reasons to believe that the well was really purified and a lot of trouble might ensue. But if water from the purified well is poured into all the Balahi wells of the village, people will keep quiet even if they believe that the purification has not been performed properly, because in this case their own well would be polluted. After that a

caste dinner is given to all the Balahis of the village, from the returns of the collection taken among the villagers.

Balahis, as other Hindus, regard it as a serious crime to watch the mating of crows. Whoever is found guilty of this act is expelled from the caste and must perform the *sarni* purification ceremony. The Balahis are ignorant of the reason for this strange law. But it seems that the crow stands in a certain relation to the ancestors of the Balahis. On the feast of the ancestors crows are fed, and it is believed that the ancestors will benefit from it. However, there is no law forbidding the killing of a crow though no Balahi will ever do such a thing intentionally. If a Balahi by accident kills a crow, he is not punished for it. It is commonly believed among the Balahis that crows do not die but have eternal life.

### (3) Relations to Other Castes

Though the Balahis as a caste have a very low social position in the caste system, the individual members of the caste generally have no intention of improving their standard in order to attain a higher social status (even if that were possible). With great stubbornness do they retain even those old traditions and customs of theirs which are the main causes of their social ostracism. It is extremely difficult to wean the Balahis from eating carrion and collecting the leavings of other people's dinners, from using clothes taken off the body of a deceased person before burial or burning. Occasional efforts at reform have been rather half-hearted, and soon ended in failure. Even if they recognise that with the abandonment of such usages they could improve their social status, they will hold on to them in the conviction that fate has placed them in this particular position in the social order of India and that they have no right to revolt against their destiny.

Generally speaking, though it may often inconvenience them, the Balahis are not ashamed of their social inferiority. As strangers among members of high-castes they often try to hide their Balahi origin and pretend that they are Rajputs or Kunbis whose caste customs they know well enough to pass as such. But frequently they are found out by members of other castes, because their peculiar pronunciation, their way of dressing, and certain peculiar habits betray them as Balahis. It is not easy to deceive people who have a certain acquaintance with Balahis. But commonly, when Balahis coming to a strange village find that members of their own caste are living there, they do not conceal their caste and prefer to associate with their caste fellows, for they would not feel at home with members of other castes.

The Balahis are not commonly treated with contempt by members of higher castes, but rather as a people with whom one should not be in close contact. A high-caste man feels polluted and must take a bath if he is touched by a Balahi; if a Balahi sits down on the bedstead of a high-caste man, the latter will wash it after such use and himself take a bath.

However, there are some Balahis, and their number is increasing, who are beginning to resent such caste discrimination and now feel offended if they are treated as untouchables. But such Balahis usually have enjoyed some education and have been affected by the spirit of modern civilisation which at least pretends to have done away with caste and class distinctions. Those in particular who have passed through the Christian mission schools have become sensitive to the treatment meted out to them by the higher castes. It appears that in the Nimar many Balahis embraced Christianity because they thought that as Christians they would gain a higher social and economic position. But as most of the Balahis assumed the Christian religion as superficially as a cloak under which to hide their former self, without even changing those customs and usages which Hindus consider objectionable, without seriously practicing their new religion, the result was only that the Christian religion was degraded in the eyes of the high castes and looked down upon as the "Balahi religion", without any profit to the Balahis.

However, the Balahis who feel offended when treated as untouchables are still a small group. Most of the Balahis are quite indifferent towards the crusade which aims at the abolishment of untouchability. They would be surprised if a high-caste man treated them as his equals and would only take advantage of such condescension. There is a saying in the Nimar which expresses well this weakness of the Balahis: "Allow a Balahi to enter your house, and he will soon sit at your hearth-fire! (the most sacred spot in an Indian house)". Consequently a sudden relief from their social degraded status would not benefit them at first. They should be given time to adjust themselves to a gradual change of their social status among the peoples of India. As long as the Balahis remain what they are, the castes of a higher social standing believe to have their good reasons if they fight shy of too close a contact with Balahis.

The cause of the low social status of the Balahis is not quite clear. RUSSELL is probably right when he says that: "The reason why the weavers rank so low may, perhaps, be that the Aryans when they settled in villages in northern India despised all handicrafts as derogatory to their dignity. These were left to the subject tribes, and as a large number of weavers would be required, the industry

would necessarily be embraced by the bulk of those who formed the lowest stratum of the population, and has ever since remained in their hands. If cloth was first woven from the treecotton plant growing wild, the business of picking and weaving it would naturally have fallen to the non-Aryan jungle tribes, who afterwards became the impure menial and labouring castes of the village"<sup>24</sup>).

All Hindu castes regard the Balahis as untouchables whose touch or food is polluting. It is said that the distinctive items in food are: water, salt, and milk. No member of a Hindu caste is allowed to accept anything from a Balahi which contains either water or salt, or milk. Thus Balahi servants are not permitted to milk the cows, water-buffaloes, or goats of a Hindu employer, neither may they draw water from the well for their master. Money, grain, or fruits a Hindu is permitted to accept from a Balahi. But Hindus usually avoid accepting anything directly from the hand of a Balahi: the latter must place the thing on the ground from where the high-caste man picks it up, cleaned from pollution by contact with Mother-Earth.

Of all higher castes, the Rajputs make certain exceptions in their treatment of the Balahis. They may sit on bullock-carts driven by a Balahi, they may also touch them with impunity and occasionally even wrestle with them. This more intimate contact between Rajputs and Balahis is explained by the Rajputs as a result of their long-standing connection: The Balahis are since immemorable times the servants and menials of the Rajputs. Then, they proudly add: "We are Rajputs. Who will dare to call us to account for what we do?"

Modern times have brought a certain moderate improvement of the treatment of the untouchable Balahis. Nowadays scarcely anybody objects to a Balahi sitting close to him in a railway carriage or a bus; at a few government wells they are even permitted to draw water together with members of higher castes; Balahi children, at least in principle, are entitled to attendance in schools along with high-caste children. In the towns barbers and inn-keepers do no longer ask their customers to which caste they belong.

But in general, the lot of the Balahis is still bad enough. In the village they are excluded from social contact with high-caste people; they have their separate quarters, and are often not even permitted to pass through the main roads of the village where the caste people live. In some villages a Balahi still does not dare to wear a clean shirt or a loin cloth arranged in the manner of caste people. A Balahi must dismount from a horse when he meets a high-caste man walking, and several cases are known of Balahis

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<sup>24</sup>) R. V. RUSSELL and HIRALAL: *op. cit.* vol. III, p. 548—549.

who have received a severe beating because they refused to eat carrion or the leavings of a high-caste dinner. It is said that in times not long passed a Balahi was not even allowed to spit on the ground for fear of polluting a high-caste man who might tread on his spittle. He had to carry a spittoon on a string around his neck, to prevent him from spitting on the ground.

But with equal, if not greater, severity the Balahis treat members of castes a shade lower than their own. With undescribable dignity they ask a man who fails to respect them: "Am I a Methar that you treat me so?" The Balahis are the first to complain if in school their children have to sit with children of a lower caste, and they keep their distance from a Mehtar more carefully than any member of a higher caste.

Some years ago it happened at Sirpur that a Mehtar died. His was the only family of his caste in the village, and as he was an outcasted Korku (aboriginal) doing sweeper-work, not even members of the sweeper caste proper would bury him. The deceased left a widow with two small children who between themselves were unable to carry the corpse to the burial ground. Since the body had to be disposed of and the high-caste people refused to have anything to do with it, the Balahis solved the problem in the following way: they made a bullock-cart ready and drove it before the hut of the sweeper. Then the widow with great difficulty dragged the body of her husband out of the hut and with a beam lifted it on the cart. She herself had to drive the cart to the burial ground, where the Balahis dug a shallow hole. The widow, unable to lift the heavy body of her husband from the cart, caught the legs of the corpse and thus dragged the body to the hole, rolled him into it and covered the grave with mud and stones.

Tears were streaming down her face and heavy sobs heaved her chest during this sad performance, while the Balahis looked on without lifting a hand. They would have been outcasted, had they even touched the body.

At another time some Balahis met a starving and dying woman lying helpless on the road-side. Asked whether they had rendered any help to the poor woman, the Balahis replied: "How could we offer her even a cup of water? She was not of our caste, and would have refused any help from us!"

Some years ago it happened at Harsud that members of the higher castes decided to abolish untouchability. They arranged an inter-caste dinner, and a Brahman, a Bania, a Balahi, and a Methar were invited to eat together. The dinner took place in public and the pioneers of caste-abolition were applauded by many lookers-on. When the dinner was over, the diners were received by their caste

community without objection or censure. Only the Balahis objected and outcasted the representative of their community because he had eaten with a Mehtar! The Mehtars answered this slight against their caste by outcasting their representative because he had eaten with a Balahi! When the Brahmans and Banias heard of this, they could do nothing else but outcast the men who had eaten with a Balahi and a Mehtar. Thus the bold attempt towards greater union between the different castes of India failed miserably at Harsud! It is significant that it was the Balahis who protested first against this breach of their caste rules.

Typical is also the following event: The Balahis of a village near Khandwa made an application to the Tahsildar for permission to use the government well. The permission was granted and the other castes warned not to prevent the Balahis from use of the government well. But high-caste Hindus were opposed to the decision of the Revenue Officer and counteracted it by calling the Balahis to a meeting where they declared: "Look here — if you insist upon your right to use the well, we will make the Mehtars draw water from the same well. Then your caste-fellows will outcast you!" The Balahis sent another deputation to Khandwa and placed a complaint against the high-caste people of their village. They were very astonished and hurt when they heard that the Mehtars had as much right to use the well as they. They emphatically declared that they could never draw water from a well defiled by Mehtars.

The Balahi must perform the solemn purification ceremony, called *sarni*, if he is beaten by a Mehtar, Mang, Dhobi, or Fermal. If such a person touches a Balahi, the latter must take a bath. If, however, a Balahi beats a member of the above named castes, he is punished by having to perform *sarni*. But the beating of an unclean person is generally not considered to be so polluting as the fact of being beaten. An instance will prove it: Some years ago a group of Balahis celebrated the reconciliation of an outcasted Balahi by a drinking-bout at Khar (Ryotwari). A Mehtar approached the party and demanded a drink. He got it. When he became insolent and demanded more drinks, the Balahis shoed him off. In the quarrel that ensued a Balahi was beaten by the Mehtar. The poor man was at once excommunicated by his caste fellows and condemned to pay a fine of a few bottles of liquor. The fined Balahi complied with the decision of the jury, but demanded the punishment of the insolent sweeper. In consequence the whole group of slightly drunk Balahis bounced upon the Mehtar and gave him a sound beating. Then, feeling themselves put out of caste by this informal execution of justice, they bought some more bottles of liquor, invited the whole Balahi

community of Khar to join them and washed off their "impurity" with liquor.

The relation of the Balahis to Chamars, Nahals, and Mahars is more that of an equal footing. It is said that many Mahars from Burhanpur join the Balahi caste when they come to the Nimar. But the Balahis assert that the Mahars are lower than they, because they eat horse-flesh which the Balahis will not. The Mahars, on the other hand, believe that the Balahis are the inferior caste. Thus it is difficult to decide this question of precedence. The same holds good for the relation between Balahis and Nahals. Although the Balahis claim that they are higher in caste than the Nahals, the other castes seem to believe the contrary. For the members of a respectable caste may use the plates of a Nahal in preparing his meal, but never that of a Balahi. They too are allowed to enter a Nahal house without fear of pollution, while a Balahi house cannot be entered without pollution. Though the Nahals, like the Balahis eat carrion and *jufha* they are treated better than the Balahis, probably because they are regarded as a semi-aboriginal caste, while the Balahis are accepted as a community within the Hindu fold.

A Balahi loses his caste if he sits with a Mehtar on the same bed or bullock-cart, not so if his companion is a Chamar or Nahal. The Mehtar, on the other hand, does not accept water or cooked food from a Balahi because the latter eats carrion and beef which the Mehtar does not. If a Balahi is accepted into the Mehtar caste, he must give up the habit of eating beef. But both castes eat the remains of a high-caste banquet.

Dhobis commonly refuse to wash Balahi clothes because the Balahis, as carrion and beef eaters, are unclean for the Dhobis. On the other hand, Balahis regard the Dhobis as unclean because the latter wash soiled clothes.

#### (5) Other Offences against Caste Laws and Traditions

All infringements of the moral code may be brought before the caste *panchayat*. Damage to another man's property and good name, thefts, quarrels, in fact all kinds of misbehaviour fall within the jurisdiction of the *panch*. If the delinquent is obstinate and does not submit to the decision of the caste authorities, or if he refuses to pay his fine, he can be expelled from the caste. But as soon as he gives in and conforms to caste usage, he is taken back into the caste, after giving a caste dinner and paying an additional fine.

On the whole, the Balahis are a law-abiding people. Especially averse to any deeds of violence; brawls and man-slaughter are rare events among them. They generally lack the courage required to a

murder in cold blood, to a daring robbery or house-breaking. If they ever are connected with dacoits, they act as a reconnoitring party or watch against surprise during a robbery. It is said that in former times when large bands of dacoits ravaged the country the Balahis often acted as informers and spies. But these times are now past.

However, the Balahis have a certain weakness for petty thefts. It is mainly fruits of the field that they take: grain, cotton, grass which they sell in the market in small quantities. They are often tempted to take agricultural tools which are left lying in the fields. But their wages are often very low and are often unjustly withheld by their employers so that they are in a way encouraged to take in secret compensation what they cannot get by honest means. Balahis generally do not consider such occasional thefts wrong.

Some Balahis have a bad reputation as bazaar thieves. They go in small groups to a shop where they try to occupy the attention of the shop-keeper while the most handy man takes his chance and grabs what he can get. If caught, he is naturally abandoned by his companions who pretend not to know him. But if the thief is successful the booty is divided among the whole party.

A Balahi does not find fault with keeping for himself what he finds by chance. If the owner discovers and claims his property, he will return his find, but not without trying to exact a small remuneration.

The Balahi temper is distrustful and suspicious with a tendency to dissimulation and guile: the usual barriers behind which the weak and inferior entrench themselves.

They certainly do not find anything wrong with conventional lies. And they are sure that a lie is justified if some profit can be achieved by it. In conversation they are inclined to exaggerate and they are always ready for the so-called white and official lie, if the telling extricates them from trouble. Usually they do not feel ashamed if caught lying, but they do consider it impolite if one scolds them for lying.

In the Balahi villages gossiping is a wide-spread evil. Nothing remains private under the prying eyes of the fellow villagers. There is nothing sacred from the garrulous Balahis, not even the intimate affairs of husband and wife and the news of a scandal spreads with incredible rapidity from house to house, from village to village. This immoderate gossiping often disturbs the peace of family or village communities and leads to many quarrels and lifelong enmities.

In quarrels the Balahis seldom come to blows. But they curse and abuse so vilely that besides them the greatest expert in sexual pathology may appear a mere child in his knowledge of possible sexual aberrations. Most abuse applies to vilification of the female

relatives of an opponent and intimates an illicit or dishonourable sexual relation with persons who should be beyond such a relation.

The most common and mildest form of abuse is the use of the term *sala* (wife's brother). The use of this term is to imply improper relations between the speaker and the sister or daughter of the man so addressed<sup>35</sup>). Another common, but much stronger, term of abuse is: *Thari bahin ki chut!* (Your sister's private part) or *thari ma ki chut!* (your mother's private part). Usually only the first two words (*thari ma* or *thari bahin*) are pronounced. These expressions mean, by implication, an immoral relation with one's mother, or sister. While this abuse is continuously shouted by bullock-drivers, persons are thus abused only in real anger. Sometimes a man expresses his intention to dishonour his enemy's mother or sister, an abuse which is considered as very offensive.

Another form of abuse is to vilify or wish harm to an adversary's parents or children, or other relatives. The superstitious Balahis believe that such curses often come true and therefore feel deeply hurt by such curses. They do not easily forgive such words.

Other, less offensive, terms of abuse are: *Suar* (pig), or: *suar ka bachcha* (son of a pig), *pankutti* (bitch), *ullu* (owl), *pagal* (fool), and many others. All these words of abuse are common all over the Hindi-speaking parts of India and are not peculiar to Balahis.

While the Balahis are not so easily offended by mere abuse, they are generally very afraid of a beating. It is considered particularly humiliating if the beating is done with a shoe. A beaten Balahi is often heard to cry: *Are, are! Haun mar jaunga!* (Ah me! I am going to die!). It is in fact believed that a man beaten by an enemy will fall sick in the near future and may even die. Balahis, beaten or abused by a person socially superior will rarely retaliate, generally they accept such abusive treatment with humility. They have learned by bitter experience that a passive acceptance is the only possible attitude to avoid greater harm.

Quarrels and squabbles among relatives, even serious differences, are soon forgiven and forgotten. But a Balahi has a long memory for offences caused by others. At the time of the insult he may remain impassive, but he will bide his time and take revenge at the first opportunity. Then he can be cruel and hard. Even a dying enemy is not easily forgiven and his adversaries will absent themselves from his funeral. Not only the slighted man himself, but often his relatives too will keep up the feud. It often happens that, when a quarrel cannot be settled, the friction between two parties becomes

<sup>35</sup>) A man's *sala* is his inferior by virtue of the sentiment underlying hypergamy. Though hypergamy is not practiced by the Balahis, it is well-known to Hindus in general.

a permanent feud. All contact is broken off between the fighting groups, they cease to smoke together and to interdine. Sometimes a wall is built across the village, separating the two sides. Such village groups are called *ter*. No member of a *ter* can take part in any affair of another *ter*, except children below the marriageable age. Sometimes in a big village there are several such groups which remain separated through generations. Caste leaders often make efforts at reconciliation, and sometimes they succeed, but if the quarrel is serious another reason is soon discovered to renew the friction. However, such divisions in a village are not without certain pecuniary advantages: the expenses for caste dinners, wedding or funeral banquets which in a large village cost quite a lot of money are considerably reduced if only a fraction of the village or only one *ter* is eligible to partake.

## Chapter VI

### Regulation of Sex Behaviour

The Balahi code of sex morality is, in principle, clear and practicable: Sexual relations are permitted within any relationship which can be regarded as legal marriage; condemned as sinful are all sexual relations outside wedlock if they involve the life and future welfare of a possible member of the caste. The legal attitude of the Balahis towards sex-relations appears to be influenced by two considerations; solicitude for the child as the fruit of sexual intercourse, and regard for the right of property.

Sexual intercourse, therefore, which cannot result in procreation is of no concern to the caste authorities and not subject to their jurisdiction unless it violates a right of property. A rather indulgent attitude, in general, is taken toward the sex-relations of persons who are either too young or too old for procreating children. In consequence sexual intercourse out of wedlock is punished only if a woman becomes with child, for in this case the life and welfare of a future caste member is at stake, since the natural guardian of the child, the father, does not assume his responsibilities. — The other point, the right of property, forbids a married woman to have sex-relations with any one but her lawful husband. For a wife is her husband's property for which he has paid a price. Thus adultery is only punished by the caste authorities if a man accuses his wife before the *panch* and demands recompensation from her paramour. But a woman cannot appeal to the *panch* when her husband is unfaithful.

In public when members of the different sexes are present Balahi modesty demands that sex be entirely ignored. Only in meetings of members of the same sex may sex relations be discussed, and then

the Balahis do so without restraint. But in the presence of members of the opposite sex the Balahi attitude is rather puritanical. This goes so far that a man may not call his wife by her name and *vice versa* and a married couple may not show the least intimacy in public. The reason for this rule is not a feeling of shame or natural delicacy, but the endeavour to avoid the slightest provocation for any undue familiarity between members of the opposite sex. The Balahis are inclined to interpret the slightest expressions of familiarity as approaches to illicit sex-relations. If a man is only seen to smile at a woman, he is already accused of intimacy with her.

The Balahis speak in quite unmistakable terms of the immorality of illicit sex-relations. This attitude, however, appears to be highly theoretical, for in practice they are not always so averse to offending against these rules. But they take care to maintain the greatest secrecy in their forbidden sex affairs because of the consequences which a detection will have.

### (1) Incest

The most serious sexual offence in the opinion of the Balahis is incest, that is sex-relations between prohibited degrees of relationship. Prohibited degrees of kindred are: consanguinity which extends to members of the same clan, and the clan of one's mother; cognate and agnate relationship till the fourth degree; and the peculiar relationship formed either by adoption or by the spiritual bond created by special ceremonies usually at the time of the Rakhi festival. These impediments in the way of marriage are, to a certain extent, reduced in favour of Balahi Brahmans, Sadhus, Bhats and Nais, because these groups marry among themselves and, in view of the comparatively small size of their communities, would find it difficult to get marriage-partners. No feeling of sinfulness is therefore attached in these groups to marriage between first cousins, provided they belong to different clans, while such unions would not be tolerated among other Balahis. Spiritual relationships are formed to give a long friendship a firm foundation and to do away with certain restrictions which public opinion finds necessary to impose in social intercourse between members of the opposite sex. But as soon as these barriers are removed with entering into such a spiritual union, the sex taboos begin to regulate and to control familiarity between such persons.

Incest is regarded as a breach of the sex regulations the more serious the closer the relationship is between the transgressors. It is punished with exclusion from the caste and its expiation demands a more or less expensive caste dinner and the payment of a fine.

In the belief of the Balahis also a divine sanction is attached to these incest taboos: transgressors are believed to get worms in their wounds, leprosy, or a similar disease, in this life or in a future rebirth.

The aversion to incest is so firmly ingrained in the Balahis that it is considered a sufficiently effective barrier between relatives of the opposite sex and they therefore need not observe the usual restrictions in social intercourse. Even relations of a spiritual character enjoy the same privileges. But this intimacy is not permitted between certain degrees of affinity (in the sense of relationship by marriage); probably, because in such relationship the incest rules are not strong enough to prevent sex offences. Thus it is against a strict Balahi regulation if a man is alone with a wife of his sons, or a woman with a husband of her daughters; and equally severe are the rules of conduct concerning the relations between a man and the wives of his younger brothers. A man who beats his daughter-in-law is outcasted by the *panch*. These rules have probably been introduced to prevent fathers and elder brothers from abusing their authoritative position. And, as experience seems to prove, such strict rules of conduct have not been imposed without reason: relatively numerous cases are known of undue familiarity and even of sex relations between relatives connected by marriage. The Balahis are even stricter in this regard than other low castes who allow the marriage between a man and the widow of his elder brother: they do not tolerate such a union.

It appears that the incest regulations of the Balahis are not based upon any knowledge of the fact that mating between closely related persons results in race-deterioration. The rules against incest are, apparently, motivated by the fear that the peace of a family would be disturbed if irregular sex relations within the family were not strictly prohibited and severely punished.

## (2) Sex Perversities

The number of homosexuals among the Balahis appears to be fairly large. Homosexual practices are not punished by the caste authorities, but incur a certain amount of social odium, inverts are certainly subjected to ridicule and contempt. Persons who will not or cannot perform normal sexual intercourse with the opposite sex are believed to be not fully grown-up, or physically deficient.

It is said that some of the professional Balahi dancers who perform in female attire and often affect effeminate manners are homosexuals and may even prostitute themselves. But there is no evidence that the homosexuals among the Balahis are generally

conspicuously different from normal people as regards their intelligence, their social habits, or normal life. They usually get married and may found a family. If the inversion of a married partner is too strongly pronounced, the other partner will soon get dissatisfied and effect a divorce.

Temporary homosexuality, and sexual intercourse with animals, is at times practiced in adolescence or by widowed persons, when the natural way of satisfying the sex-urge is impossible or forbidden. Usually such practice is abandoned after marriage.

Many Balahis maintain that Balahi women now and then require a severe beating. Such beatings are particularly frequent in the first year after marriage. It may be that a young husband finds it necessary to assert himself in this way, but it appears that woman-beating has often a sexual significance and is believed to stimulate fertility. Barren women are particularly often subjected to such treatment.

### (3) Premarital Sex Relations

#### (a) Between Married Partners

Sexual intercourse between boy and girl, even after their marriage, is not permitted before the *ana* ceremony<sup>36)</sup> has taken place. Balahi custom demands that boy and girl wedded but not yet living as man and wife should neither speak to one another nor meet together. However, if they live in the same village and chance meetings are inevitable, boy and girl not seldom become intimate. If their relatives find them out they usually scold them a little because they fear the gossip of their fellow villagers. But on the whole parents rather like it if boy and girl favour each other. Theoretically, however, sex relations between such a young couple are forbidden before the *ana* ceremony has been performed. If the relatives of a boy and girl find that the young couple desire each other, they simply allow the *ana* ceremony to take place and thus make their sex relations lawful.

#### (b) Between Others

Since an offence of the sex regulations is not punished severely unless a child is born of such an illicit union, passing love-affairs between half-grown people are not taken very serious. Both boys and girls may take the initiative in such intrigues. But they are careful not to be caught in embarrassing situations, for then they could be punished by the *panch*.

<sup>36)</sup> Cf. page 219 ff.

Mere flirtations, however, do not satisfy Balahi lovers; they are not content merely with kissing and hugging a sweetheart. Once the first approach has been made and the barriers between two persons of the opposite sex are broken down, they do not stop halfway. That is perhaps the reason why the Balahis are so strict in judging even the remotest signs of intimacy.

In a village where caste fellows live so close together, the first approaches of a love-affair are easy. There are signs enough to express without fear of detection the desire for sexual intercourse which may be ignored or accepted by the person to whom they are addressed. It is enough to stare hard at a woman and to smile at her. If she replies with a smile it is an indication that she is not averse to arranging a clandestine meeting. A lover puts his finger to his ear, and if the woman on observing the gesture smiles and nods, the next step is to arrange a trysting place. An opportunity for a meeting is easily found, either in the house of one of the lovers when the other members of the family are absent, on the threshing floor, or at an out-of-the-way place in the field or jungle. If a woman takes the initiative, she may tell the man: "You owe me some money. When are you going to pay me?" Or she says to him: "*Makha bhukh lagat!* — I am hungry!"

It is generally believed in the Nimar that with the exception perhaps of the Mehtars and Nahals the sex morality of the Balahis is lower than that of other castes. But it should not be forgotten that a great number of Balahi lads have to postpone their marriage for want of money and young widowers find it even more difficult to raise the money for a second wife. These unmarried men naturally run much after the girls and women of their village. But it must not be assumed that they have it all their own way! It is true that the caste elders of the village cannot take legal action against them, as long as their love-affairs remain secret. But a man with the reputation of a Don Juan is generally disliked and feared and soon becomes unpopular in his village. Afraid of a scandal, the parents of girls do not welcome his visits, he is left alone or gets involved in a quarrel with the relatives of his sweet-hearts or their jealous husbands.

And as far as the Balahi women are concerned, they are more exposed to moral danger than high-caste women: they cannot keep within the protective walls of their houses, but must go to the fields and often also to the houses of their employers for work. The latter may sometimes take advantage of their economic dependency and prove a danger to their virtue. It is said that particularly in villages with a large proportion of Mohammedan employers it is sometimes silently included in the contract of a Balahi servant that he must

lend his wife or daughter to his employer. Or a woman or girl is employed for appearance' sake as a *gobarwali* (woman who removes manure) for menial work in the stable, but also for the pleasure of her employer. The Hindu employers are generally less dangerous to the virtue of their female servants, since their caste rules strictly forbid them irregular liaisons with low-caste Balahi women, but Mohammedans have no such prejudices. It is a fact that the moral reputation of Balahi women in villages with a large Mohammedan population is rather bad. In a few villages it is said that the Mohammedan lads come openly in the evening to fetch a girl or woman for the night. Parents or husbands keep quiet for fear of a beating, or smile complacently in expectation of a handsome remuneration.

However, such conditions prevail in few villages<sup>37</sup>). Generally an unmarried girl or widow who is suspected of having a paramour is soon married off by her relatives to a man in a distant village where nothing is known of the scandal. It is extremely rare that an unmarried girl is found with child, since almost all girls are married at an early age and, if necessary, a marriage can quickly be arranged before the signs of pregnancy appear. Thus illicit sex relations can easily be hushed up without a public scandal. But if it should happen that a yet unmarried girl becomes pregnant, she is expelled from the caste and never readmitted. A widow, even a child-widow, is only outcasted and can be readmitted into the caste after birth of the child.

Such is the usual procedure in offences against the sex regulations. However, some latitude is allowed in the treatment of transgressors. While a poor and simple Balahi would be punished with the full severity of the law for a single slip, notoriously bad characters are rarely in danger of being outcasted or severely punished for repeated offences of the same law. There is nobody with enough courage to report them to the *panch*, because all are afraid of their revenge. And even when such men or women are once indicted, they are usually able to bribe or bully the caste elders into acquitting them of their charges.

In a certain village, for instance, a widow was known to have sexual intercourse not only with her younger brother-in-law, but even with the husband of her daughter who lived in her house. Mother and daughter were frequently overheard quarrelling between themselves who of them would sleep with the young man. Both mother and daughter were for some time employed by a Mohammedan

<sup>37</sup>) In the Census of India 1931 no Balahi females were returned as prostitutes.

contractor who paid them double wages, for work and for pleasure. Every one in the village knew of this state of things, but nobody had the courage to say a word of reproof in public, because the widow had a fierce temper and was protected by influential relatives.

While it is difficult or impossible to enforce the caste laws against transgressors who openly defy these time-honoured regulations, the more respectable Balahis usually retaliate by refusing to intermarry with these ill-reputed families. Particularly do they object to marrying their daughters into villages where the Balahi women are known to associate with Mohammedans.

### Extra-marital Sex Relations

If it is brought to the knowledge of the caste elders that a married man has a love-affair with a woman or girl of the same caste, the village *panch* will give him an official warning to break with her. But the man's own wife has no right to accuse him before the caste council or even to demand a promise of amendment. The only way open to her under the circumstances is to run away and to return to her parents. If she takes her children with her, it is a sign that she is willing eventually to return to her husband. After a few days her husband will pay a visit to his parents-in-law and demand the return of his wife. His parents-in-law will scold him for his bad behaviour and demand from him a promise that he will break with the other woman. If the man is able to convince his parents-in-law of his innocence or of his firm resolve to reform, they will command their daughter to return with her husband. But if the wife's parents do not trust his words they will demand stronger proofs of his good will. The man will have to go home without his wife and children, but after a short while he will return with some friends or relatives to plead for him. During the time of his wife's absence he must be careful not to be caught in a compromising situation with the other woman, for in such a case the village *panch* would outcast him. If his wife returns with him on her husband's second or third visit, all is well. But if she still refuses to come with him, he may demand the return of his children. This is an indication that he thinks of divorce. For if the woman gives up her children, the domestic quarrel cannot anymore be patched up. The marriage will be dissolved and the man is then free to remarry.

If a man finds that his wife has been unfaithful, he may call the village *panch* and demand the punishment of her paramour. But as long as the man keeps silent, the *panch* cannot intervene even if the fact of adultery is publicly known. Sometimes it happens that a husband is heavily bribed by the lover of his wife to keep his

peace. But more often a man does not want to drag his domestic trouble before the public and he will first resort to other means to bring his wife to reason. The usual punishment of a faithless wife is a merciless beating. Sometimes, however, the chastisement of an unfaithful woman is not even possible. For though in theory nobody has a right to interfere when a man beats his wife, usually the neighbours are soon attracted by the screams and tears of the woman and try to calm the furious husband. Or the woman may have some relatives in the village, who will come to her assistance. They may even give the husband a beating or take his wife away from him. In such a case, or if a beating does not help, the exasperated husband may at last denounce his wife to the village *panch*. The case will be tried before the *panch* and if the culprits are convicted, they are both outcasted. For the woman's readmission into the caste her husband will of course bear the expenses: he must pay the fine and give a caste dinner.

If a woman has a child from such an irregular union, the child is regarded as legitimate and of the lawful husband until the contrary has been proved. In such a case the unfaithful woman is outcasted and her husband has to pay for her reconciliation to the caste unless he prefers to divorce her.

As natural, marital infidelities not seldom lead to domestic disturbances and occasionally even to criminal actions. Some years ago at Khandwa a young Balahi suspected his wife of having a love-affair with a Mohammedan. When he rebuked her, she answered back. The man became furious, snatched a sickle and tried to cut off the woman's nose and breasts. (In ancient times this was the penalty for a woman convicted of adultery.) Fortunately, neighbours came to the rescue of the woman who was already seriously wounded. Friends advised the man to report to the police and gave him the hope that in this case his punishment would not be as severe as if he tried to escape. Though the woman survived, the man was sentenced to ten years imprisonment.

In another case that came to my knowledge the offended husband did not act so rashly, but the punishment meted out to his faithless wife was no less severe. The man had been very much in love with his wife and had treated her very well. She never had to do any hard work in the fields like other women, but was allowed to stay at home, and even at home the enamoured husband did half of her housework. She was given such fine clothes and valuable jewels as her husband could afford to buy and often she sat on the bedstead idly chatting while her husband served her. The villagers nicknamed her *rani* (queen) because she was so well treated by her husband.

But the man was ill rewarded for his love. It was at the great fair of Malgaon, a village about 20 miles east of Khandwa, which the man visited with his wife, that she became acquainted with the *kotwal* (village watchman) of the place, a rural Don Juan, who had already three wives. She was quickly infatuated and yielded to his advances. But while they were making love, the pair was surprised by the woman's husband. The latter did not say much, but returned home at once with his wife. There he gave her a terrific beating. The woman ran away and took refuge in the house of her lover who, however, had no use for her and returned her to her lawful husband when he came to claim her.

From that day the man made his wife suffer. He forced her to work heavily the whole day, and on the slightest provocation he beat her mercilessly. He stripped her naked, tied her to a post and beat her till he tired. Then he chased her out of the house. Naked the poor woman had to hide in the jungle till night-fall. He forced her to drink his urine and did other undescrivable things to her, till her spirit broke. He watched her day and night and allowed her no chance for flight.

In despair the woman tried to poison her husband. Once, when his eyes were inflamed, she secretly mixed the milk of *thuar* (*Euphorbia nerifolia*) into the medicine and blinded him. This gave the woman a chance to escape. At the next opportunity she went off and sought the protection of the *kotwal* of Malgaon whom she loved. He kept her a few weeks and then sold her to another man of a distant village in the Holkar State. But the woman's first husband found out where she had gone and went with a few friends to bring her back. With great difficulty and much expense the woman was returned to him and in triumph he brought her back to his village. But still the man knew no mercy, and treated her worse than before. Whenever he could lay hands on her, he beat or abused her. The woman whose flights had been foiled so dismally saw no other way of escape and suffered with apathy, broken in body and spirit. But after a year the man suddenly died. His wife did not even wait for his funeral, she left the village at once and went to her brother who lived in a distant village. But he did not allow her to stay long with him and soon married her off to another man.

But faithlessness of a wife does not always have such dire consequences. If a husband takes too severe a revenge, her relatives usually intervene. And then, the Balahis are generally averse to acts of violence. Revenge in cold blood, as in the above mentioned case, is a rare exception. Usually the Balahis soon forget and forgive such occasional slips from the path of virtue and do not take such tragical a view of a flirtation with another man. Sometimes a man

even encourages his wife to become intimate with a lover, for a good remuneration! In Khandwa a Balahi allowed his wife, a buxom young woman, to stay with his employer for several days during the absence of the latter's wife. Sometimes an impotent Balahi is glad about an occasional lapse from virtue if so his wife becomes pregnant. The child born of such a union is his.

If a Balahi woman elopes with another man and her husband is not prepared to give her up, he will ask some relatives and friends to help him in the search for his wife. Usually the lovers are soon discovered in the village where they have taken refuge. While some men of the husband's party guard the paths leading out of the village against a possible escape of the fugitives, he with the rest of the party calls on the caste elders of the village and demands the surrender of his wife. If the seducer of the woman has no friends or relatives in the village to come to his assistance, he is usually forced to hand over the woman to her lawful husband. And he is lucky if he escapes without a severe beating by the revengeful husband and his friends. It is on such occasions that Balahis sometimes commit a homicide. The unfaithful woman generally gets away with a few slaps from her husband. The usual excuse of women for an escapade is that their paramour had given them a love-potion so that they could not help being infatuated by him. The Balahis firmly believe in such love-charms.

In a village near Khandwa a married man eloped with a young widow. The woman's brother went with some friends to bring her back, for he had no intention to lose the money which he expected as a bride-price in a marriage arranged by him. The lovers were caught in a village some 50 miles away and handed over to the search-party by the Korku *patel* (headman) of the village. Both fugitives were brought back to their native village, the woman to be married to somebody else who could pay for her, the man to be punished by the *panch*. It was decided to give the seducer an exemplary punishment by shaving off half his beard and hair, by blackening his face with tar and soot, and then leading him round in the village and beating him all the time. But the *patel* of the village objected to such lawless lynching, took off his shoe, gave the culprit a few slaps and chased him out of the village. The man retired to another near village where he was joined by his wife whom he had deserted. Here he met one day some Balahis of his native village. Conversation naturally drifted to his adventure. Mentioning his punishment, this Balahi Don Juan remarked contemptuously: "*Kya hua? Khali kuchh mara!* — What happened? I only got a few slaps!"

Sometimes the husband of a woman who elopes with another man is not anxious to take her back. He is more intent to recover

the silver-ornaments which she may have taken along or to get some money from her lover in exchange for his wife. The amount of recompensation is fixed by the village *panch*. This money paid to the former husband of the woman enables him to marry another wife. It is in fact a recompensation for the expenses he had incurred in marrying the woman and for the bride-price which he had paid for her.

A widow who elopes with a marriageable man is allowed to stay with him provided he agrees to pay the bride-price demanded by her relatives and a fine imposed by the *panch*. If the man is not prepared to marry the woman or cannot pay, her relatives marry her off to the next man who wants her. But the woman's chances for a good marriage are not much impaired by such adventures. Balahis are often remarkably indifferent to the past of their wives and optimistic enough to believe that they will make the woman so happy that she will have no desire to repeat her past feat.

A woman who becomes the concubine of a high-caste man is not expelled from the caste. As a matter of fact, she is not punished at all and may marry any Balahi when the high-caste man leaves her. But if a woman associates with a man of a lower caste, she is temporarily outcasted. After leaving the low-caste man, she must pay a heavy fine and give a caste dinner before she can be reconciled. Children of such unions are not admitted into the caste.

## Chapter VII

### Caste Officials

#### (1) *The bhat*

Legend relates that Ganga, the second founder of the Balahi caste, assigned to one Balahi the task of making a register of all Balahis, noting down their clans, families, the name of each person, their native place, and date of birth, marriage and death. The Balahi who became the first registrar (*bhat* or *rao*) was of the clan Hanu-mantya. When he died his sons divided the register he had made among themselves, each one taking a part of the book containing a number of clans and families whose genealogies they continued to keep up to date. In the course of time, as the Balahi caste increased in numbers and spread over the whole of Central India, the descendants of the first *bhat* divided the whole area among themselves. Each *bhat* took it upon himself to visit about a hundred or more villages and to record in his register the important events of each Balahi family in his district.

And this custom continues to the present day: The sons of the *bhat*, after his death, divide the villages in their father's charge

among themselves, copy from the original register the names of clans and families of their villages in a new register for their own use. The original book remains with the eldest son. On his tours through the villages the *bhat* does not carry with him the original register, but a copy of it, lest his original register should suffer or be lost on the journey.

It is generally soon after the harvest that the *bhat* goes on his round visit of the villages of his area. He visits each Balahi house where a birth or death has taken place during the previous year and for recording such an event he receives the traditional fee. But his arrival is not always as welcome as it ought to be. He may be told: "Maharaj, I have no money at present. Come at another time!" Two or three times the *bhat* may thus come in vain to enter a new-born child's name into his register till at last his visit is opportune.

A bedstead is placed before the house or on the veranda, and the *bhat* is invited to sit down. He lays his book on the bedstead, where he himself then takes his seat. He opens the book and looks for the name of the child's father and goes through the whole genealogy of the man, right back to the founder of the family and the clan. He relates the name of his clan deity, and reveals the rites of worship, and other rules and restrictions peculiar to his clan. Then he enters into his register—the date of birth and the name of the new-born baby; sometimes if the *bhat* has failed to visit the family for a long time two or three children are registered at one time. The registration of each child costs one or two rupees in fees to the *bhat*.

Often the *bhat* is invited to attend the marriage of a Balahi. It is his task to unite the hands of the partners at the exact moment of sunset. He gets a fee of one and a quarter rupees for his service. Even if he has not been invited or is unable to attend the marriage, this fee is paid to him either soon after the wedding or on some later occasion.

The *bhat's* register is held in great esteem: by the *bhat* because it is his main source of livelihood, by the other Balahis because it contains the history of their clans and families. Some clans even worship the *bhat's* register. The *bhat* himself yearly ties to the book all the Rakhi strings which he or his sons receive from their relatives on this feast.

The *bhats* are often also good singers and entertainers. When on tour through their districts, they sing every evening for the entertainment of the Balahis in the village in which they stay. They know not only the genealogy of each man in the village, but also the details of his life and understand how to flatter him by praising his character, wealth, or his good deeds. If nothing praiseworthy can be found in a man, his forefathers are eulogized. All Balahis find

these eulogies very pleasing and pay with pleasure for the *bhat's* performance. The other villagers listen with rapt attention, applaud the singer or smile and laugh over the *bhat's* well-meant flattery and the harmless vanity of his patron.

Generally the *bhat* is a man with some education, at least he must be able to read and to write. Usually he is also well versed in Hindu mythology and is one of the principal propagandists of the Hindu religion among the Balahis. Quite a number of his songs are taken from the Ramayana or Bhagavata (Prem-Sagar), or from the songs of Kabir.

The Balahi *bhats* practice endogamy, that is: they marry only among themselves. Since the *bhats* are few in numbers, they often find it difficult to find suitable brides for their sons, or husbands for their daughters. That is the reason, they say, why a *bhat* girl can marry even her cousin, that is, her mother's brother's son. For a considerable time the Balahi *bhats* have intermarried with Balahi *nais* (barbers) and this would seem to indicate that the Balahi *bhat* is considered socially inferior to the other Balahis. But although formerly a *bhat* visiting a Balahi house was served separately, this restriction has for the last few years been abolished and at caste dinners the *bhat* now eats with the other Balahis.

## (2) The Balahi *sadhu*

The Balahis have their own spiritual teachers (*guru*) who are themselves Balahis. They are called *sadhu*.

A *sadhu* is made at the meeting of other Balahi *sadhus*. The initiate has to feast the company of *sadhus* and then he is invested with a begging stick and a begging bowl. He goes to his own house and begs from his wife or mother who give him a small present. Then he returns to the *sadhus* who recite some *mantras* over him.

A *sadhu* may be married, he may live at home and do any kind of work. Near Khandwa there are several Balahi *sadhus* who have for years been working as railway gangmen on the line. Only at certain times of the year is the *sadhu* busy with the performance of his spiritual duties: at Janmashtami when the *mahaprashad* ceremony is performed<sup>25</sup> he goes from village to village where his followers live; he is often called to attend a wedding, but certainly his presence is required for the funeral service which takes place on the tenth day after death. The *sadhu's* performance is believed to be indispensable for the eternal peace of the deceased.

Some *sadhus* spend their whole time begging; some beg only for a short period of the year; some are well versed in the Hindu

<sup>25</sup>) Cf. description of the ritual on the feast of Janmashtami.

religion and the special sect to which they belong (usually the Kabir panth); others know very little and are just able to perform their duties in a mechanical way. Some are good singers and drummers and know how to entertain their *chelas* (disciples) for a whole night, while others are dull and quiet. Much depends on the individual character of the *sadhu*. The *sadhu's* office is not a matter of personal choice, but a hereditary vocation and a *sadhu* rarely leases his own circle of villages to any other man unless he be a close relative.

The Balahi *sadhus* dress like other Balahis. But when they officiate they wear the *mala*, a string of beads, round the neck. The beads are as big as cherries, brown, and are made of basil wood (*Ocimum sanctum* — *tulsi*). The number of beads varies according to the sect to which the *sadhu* belongs, it may be 84 or 108 or another number. Sometimes the *sadhu* also wears the *tika*, a mark on the forehead, which also varies according to the sect to which he belongs. But when a *sadhu* is off duty, he cannot easily be distinguished from other Balahis unless, as some *sadhus* do, he wears a beard.

Usually the *sadhus* know to read and to write so that they may be able to learn the holy texts of their sect (*panth*). Some Balahis follow the Gwal *panth*, others the Namandi sect etc. But most of them are Kabir *panthis*. It is said that formerly all Balahis belonged to the Kabir *panth* but this is no more so. Some *sadhus* have a special liking for Krishna, others for Rama, or Mahadeo. The Ramayana and Premsagar are known to all. They are often able to recite long passages from their sacred books in a somewhat monotonous singsong which now and then is interrupted by a short explanation of the text.

Many Balahi *sadhus* are experts in astrology and usually with more conviction than exactitude forecast the future of their clients. Others know tricks which inspire the simple villagers with awe and confidence in their *sadhu's* superhuman powers. Some simply wander from village to village and beg.

A young *sadhu* learns the essentials of his vocation from his father or from the near relative to whose followers he is supposed to administer after the death of the old *sadhu*. However, often not much instruction is required, for from childhood the young *sadhu* has watched his father or brother perform the different rites and listened to their explanations, their songs and *mantras*, till he knows them by heart. Only those religiously or ambitiously inclined go to live with other *gurus* of their sect to study and pray.

Each *sadhu* has his own circle of followers who regard him as their religious teacher and guide (*guru*). His annual collection must be made only within the limits of his 'district'. His followers

(*chela*) address him as 'Maharaj', the title of a Brahman in this part of the country. Within his district the *guru* gets the seat of honour at a banquet.

The Balahi *sadhus* interdine and intermarry with the ordinary Balahis, and no particular rules must be observed in dealing with *sadhus*.

In general the morality of the Balahi *sadhus* is high. Conscious of their position as religious teachers they try to set a good example by observing the caste laws. As they are usually married and live at home with wife and children, they are less exposed to temptation than those *sadhus* who are supposed to have completely renounced the world.

Some Balahis, as often of a *sadhu* family as not, give up their caste and home and join some temple or *sadhu* school. But these *sadhus* have nothing to do with the Balahi *sadhus*. If they after some time return to their family they are even obliged to perform the *sarni* ceremony because the other Balahis suspect them of having lost caste by associating with all kinds of people during their life as *sadhus*.

### (3) The nai

Since the barbers of the Nai caste will not lend their services to the untouchable Balahis, the latter have their own barbers (*nai*). These Balahi barbers who now form a distinct group within the Balahi community claim that they originally belonged to the Nai caste, but owing to their connection with the Balahis they were expelled from the caste and thus came to join the Balahis. As the Balahi *nais* earn their livelihood by serving the other Balahis, the latter do not regard them as their equals and generally do not intermarry with them. Only the Balahi *bhats* intermarry with the *nais* who, due to the scarcity of suitable partners, permit, like the Balahi Brahmans and *bhats*, marriage between first cousins.

To each *nai* a certain number of villages is assigned, and it is his task to cut the hair and shave the beard of all Balahis living in these villages. When a *nai* dies or retires, his sons divide their father's villages among themselves. If the number of Balahis in these villages is too small or if a *nai* has several sons, one son may take over his father's vocation, while the others take to farming or do service as field-labourers. But they still retain a barber's status and cannot intermarry with other Balahis.

The *nai* is supposed to visit each village within his range once or twice a month and to remain in every village till all Balahis have had an opportunity of a shave and a hair-cut. At certain Hindu feasts, weddings and funeral feasts, the *nai* is called to act as the

official master of ceremonies. On such occasions, as also at engagements, *panch* meetings, and other important public functions the *nai* earns a welcome addition to his rather meagre wages for his work as barber. The usual rate of payment is one rupee in cash or the equivalent in grain per head per year. A large family pays generally a reduced rate — the *nai* is not inconsiderate! In addition to this yearly payment which the *nai* collects — sometimes with great difficulties and only after repeated calls — in the harvest season, he also receives some good-will presents on certain Hindu feasts. For the days of his visit the villagers must provide him a free meal twice a day, and each family takes a turn at entertaining him. For a shave or hair-cut, barber and customer squat on the ground anywhere in the court-yard, or both sit down on a bedstead. No soap is used in shaving, chin and cheeks of the customers being gently rubbed by the wet fingers of the *nai*. The barber uses cold water summer and winter alike. After a shave a man must bathe before he can eat or drink. The glass which contained the shaving-water must be washed before it can be used again.

Old people often like their hair cut in the old fashion: the hair over the forehead is shaved off in a half-moon, about a hand-breadth deep. Others want hair and beard shaved off completely except for a meagre scalp-lock and a tiny moustache. But nowadays the most popular is a hair-cut in the western fashion.

#### (4) The Balahi Brahman

According to Balahi tradition, the first priests (*purohit*) of the Balahis at the time when they embraced the Hindu religion were real Brahmans. These Brahman priests who administered to the spiritual needs of the Balahis were supported by the fees of their clients. For convenience' sake and to be ready for any call of service they began to build their habitations near the Balahi quarters. In course of time the Balahis became more intimate with their priests, with the consequence that the other Brahmans broke off all connections with these Balahi *purohits*, declaring them as unclean as the other Balahis. Today they are called Balahi Brahmans and treated by all castes as genuine Balahis. The Brahmans, however, deny that the Balahi Brahman ever were of real Brahman origin and maintain that when the Balahis became Hindus they appointed men of their own caste as priests. These they called Brahmans because they performed the services of Brahmans for the Balahis, not because they really were of Brahmanic origin. This latter explanation is the most plausible one.

The Balahi Brahman regard themselves as somewhat superior to the other Balahis and, consequently, do not intermarry and often

do not even interdine with them. But since there are only a few Balahi Brahmans in the district, they find it difficult to observe the usual laws of exogamy. They therefore allow marriage between first cousins, provided groom and bride are of different clans. It is also customary to arrange a marriage by exchange: A Balahi Brahman will only give his daughter in marriage to a boy whose family finds a bride for his son. Such a marriage is called *adla-badla* (exchange).

The Balahi Brahmans pretend to abstain from eating meat. But this statement is often contradicted by other Balahis. So much is certain however that some Balahi Brahmans do not interdine with other Balahis. When they take part in a Balahi banquet, they get *kachcha saman* (uncooked provision) and prepare their own meal.

Formerly, when a Balahi Brahman was invited by a Balahi, the host had his whole house cleaned and freshly coated with cow-dung in honour of the guest. Before the Balahi Brahman sat down in the house, he sprinkled it all over with cow's urine, for the purpose of purification. But nowadays no such ceremonies are required.

The Balahi Brahmans are invited to administer to the spiritual needs of the Balahis on occasion of a funeral feast. They are also sometimes called to cast the horoscope of a new-born child and to give the child an auspicious name. At a betrothal the Balahi Brahman is sometimes consulted as to whether the horoscopes of the partners agree. But it appears that lately the Balahis have lost faith in the casting of the horoscope, and they often dispense with the services of the Balahi Brahman entirely.

Since the fees which the Balahis pay are small and the occasions for service rare, the Balahi Brahmans would often go hungry, had they not taken to farming. Some Balahi Brahmans are field-labourers just like other Balahis.

## Chapter VIII

### Social Life

#### (1) Rules of Politeness

When Balahis meet they greet each other: *Ram! Ram!* or *Jai Ram!* Older relatives, or persons who deserve special respect, are often greeted with a folding of the hands and touching of their feet. Non-Balahis of equal social status are greeted like other Balahis. When the Balahis meet people of higher social rank, they say: *Bandagi!* They may even turn off the way, bow low (rather awkwardly) and touch their forehead with the right hand. In former times the Balahis used to scoop dust from the road and put it on

their head. Brahmans are greeted with *Namaskar, Panditji!* Sometimes a Balahi folds his hands before a Brahman, and touching the ground before him, bowing low, he lifts his folded hands to his forehead.

No polite Balahi remains seated when a member of a high caste passes by. If a man of higher social status visits a Balahi, the latter may offer him a bed-stead as a seat of honour, while he squats on the bare ground before him. High-caste people, of course, would feel polluted by touching a Balahi bed-stead and converse standing with a Balahi. They often do not even enter the court-yard of a Balahi house. A Balahi riding a horse must dismount when he meets a high-caste man or when he passes through a village. Rajputs often force a Balahi rider to dismount if he forgets to do so. A Balahi bullock-cart driver will always make way on meeting a cart of a high-caste man, even if his cart is heavily loaded.

Balahi women do not greet a man, nor are they greeted by him unless they are close relatives. Balahi etiquette demands that whether alone or in public men pass women unnoticed and except in the case of close relatives, without addressing them. Old men may exempt themselves from this rule, and old women may be spoken to, and both will freely reply to a question; but young women must not speak with a man, especially when he is a stranger. However it is rare that the modesty of a woman is offended by a gesture or by an unbecoming attention.

If a woman wants to express her respect before a passing man, she steps aside and turns her back towards him. At the least, she covers her chest, and sometimes part of her face, with her cloth. When she meets a man of rank, she takes off her shoes. This she also does when she enters a village. Frequently Balahi women who carry a basket or pot on their head, take it off and put it down or place it on the shoulder on meeting a person of rank.

In their conversation with their equals the Balahis are rather garrulous and talkative, and on the whole they are affable and polite. Towards people of superior rank they often assume an attitude of abject humility. They overdo their professions of submission and devotedness, try to humour and flatter in every possible way, and agree to everything that is said or demanded from them. Towards people inferior to them, the Balahis can be as haughty and arrogant as the high-caste people often are to them.

### Visits

Visits are paid regularly to relatives on occasion of certain feasts, in sickness and death, for weddings and funerals, for seasonal work, and at harvest time.

A young married woman pays a visit to her parents on the feast of Holi, Rakhi, Dasahra, and Diwali. Sometimes the father or a brother of hers comes to fetch her home, or her husband accompanies her. If she stays for a longer period, her husband will go home after a few days.

Visitors may greet their hosts with *Ram! Ram!* The host will reply with *Ram! Ram!* and then ask: "*Ayo?* — Have you come?" The visitor replies: "*Ayo!* — I have come!" A daughter may touch the feet of her mother with folded hands, the mother will then embrace her daughter. If someone has died in the family of the hosts or in that of the visitors since their last visit, the women will sing a dirge while they embrace. The elder woman starts crying and lamenting, while the younger woman repeats the refrain. The husband of the woman visitor will make less fuss and after a short greeting will unyoke the bullocks, while one of the host's family brings grass for the animals. The young woman sits down with the women in the house and chats while her husband associates with the men and smokes a pipe.

After a short while everybody goes about his daily duties while the guests sit on a bedstead or help in some work. The young woman may fetch a water pot and go with her relatives to the village well where she meets and chats with the other women of the village. It is not impolite to leave a guest alone for a while. He may use this pause for a stroll through the village or for a short nap. In the evening a specially prepared meal is ready after which other villagers may appear for a chat. It is generally very late when all go to bed.

The next day a guest who attaches some value to his reputation will either do some work or get ready to leave. As a rule, guests are entertained for three days only; on the fourth day unless they have been called either for such work as ploughing or harvesting, or for nursing a sick person, they are expected to leave. When a guest takes leave he says: "Well, I am going!" The host replies: "Well, you may go. Greet your father and brothers from me!" If several persons are going to leave, they say to each other: *Chalo, chalo!* (Let's go!) The host replies: "Well, go and come again!" When the daughter of the house leaves, she touches the feet of her relatives. Her mother or an elder sister or sister-in-law puts her hands on her shoulders and both women begin to cry. After a while the rhythmical singing and sighing ceases, the woman climbs on the bullock-cart where her husband or father-in-law already waits impatiently and off go the bullocks in a sharp trot. The woman on the bullock-cart cries till the village is out of sight.

### Friendship

Among the Balahis lasting intimate relations exist, as a rule, only between relatives. But they know also the meaning of friendship. Two friends may declare themselves as 'brothers'. Such a relationship is recognised also by their relatives who then call the friends by their appropriate terms of relationship. A man can even have a 'sister' friend. This is not considered objectionable, as the ceremonial bond of such a friendship excludes the suspicion of sexual intimacy. This is called *bhai-bahin banana* (to make brother and sister). However, it does happen that nowadays under the cover of this friendship two persons become lovers, for no longer are the strict rules of separation between the sexes observed between 'brother' and 'sister'. But if such a sexual intimacy is detected, the lovers are as severely punished as if they had committed incest. Only after having paid their fine and given a caste banquet, may such lovers get married unless there are other obstacles which make a marriage impossible.

### (2) Songs and Music

The monotony of Balahi village life is occasionally enlivened by song recitals, by dancing, and by dramatic performances. These performances, so important in the life of the aborigines for animating social life and for strengthening the solidarity of the tribe, do not play such an important part in Balahi society. The reason is that the Balahis rarely sing or dance in large groups, and very seldom play games. The Balahis certainly love singing and dancing, but more as listeners and spectators than as active performers. Adult Balahis may sometimes take part in the out-door games of their children, but they have no games of their own. There are few sportsmen among the Balahis!

The Balahis love singing. They never tire of listening to a good singer, but though they may join in singing the refrain of a song, they rarely ever sing in chorus. Alone, when working in the fields or grazing the cattle, the Balahis like to sing or to hum a tune. It is astonishing how many songs the average Balahi knows. When I started to collect songs in a Balahi village, boys of between ten and 16 years were able to dictate more than a hundred songs. These boys had learned the songs by heart without the help of a book since they were ignorant of reading.

The Balahis have no original melodies of their own. Generally they use the current Indian tunes with which they are well acquainted. Even their old traditional wedding and funeral songs have no peculiar melody of their own, but are sung to the tunes current among the

Hindus. Nowadays new melodies are continually added to their repertoire from popular cinema plays, a favourite source of supply for Balahi singers. The modern melodies are adapted to the words of their old songs, sometimes a little changed or simplified to suit the limited capacity of a singer.

The Balahis do not regard songs, poems, riddles, etc., as the property of the poet or composer. From the moment, a poem is recited or a hymn sung in public, any one who can remember the words or the tune, may repeat them. The poet and the composer get no remuneration and no royalties are paid for permission to repeat a song. The poet's or the composer's name may be mentioned in the last verse of a song, if he has taken care to include his name in the text, but most of the poems are anonymous. Songs may also freely be altered or adapted to local requirements at the singer's pleasure. No copy-right exists, and plagiarism is not considered a theft.

In the hot season when field-workers rest, and on the eve of feast-days, the villagers come together in the evening and sing or listen to singing throughout the night. At the break of dawn, after an offering has been made, the singing ceases and all go to rest and sleep till late into the day.

There are in every village community men who are able to lead a song recital and to select from their rich repertoire the songs suited to the occasion. But sometimes a special singer is invited, or perhaps he just happens to come for a visit. He may be a Balahi *sadhu* or *bhat*, or a member of one of the innumerable mendicant orders who make such kinds of entertainment or instruction their profession. The singer sings ballads, composed either by himself or copied from the Ramayana or Mahabharata, or the very popular Premsagar (the story of Lord Krishna). The songs of Kabir, the weaver poet, are specially favoured by Balahi singers and they indeed provide excellent principles for a sound philosophy of life. The singer may give the holy text in the original language of the poet, but then he explains in frequent intervals the true meaning of the text. Or he presents the text in a free translation in the language of the common people.

The audience listens with rapt attention, and often accompanies the recital by rhythmic hand-clapping or by singing the refrain. Sometimes the listeners applaud a particularly beautiful or true verse with loud acclamations of *achchha* (well!) or *shabash!* (well said!) A good singer is able to entertain his audience for a whole night, and some keep their listeners spell-bound for several nights. It is marvellous how many songs these *sadhus* and *bhats* know by heart and how untiringly they sing night after night. It is they who

propagate and keep alive the Hindu religion among the ignorant people of the villages. They present the dogmatical and moral principles of Hinduism in the most attractive and impressive form, and illustrate them by innumerable parables and unforgettable stories. Difficult verses they explain in the intervals.

These singers are much honoured guests during their visit. They are well entertained as long as they stay, and are generously rewarded by gifts of grain or money when they leave.

The Balahis have not only the reputation of being good singers, but also of being good musicians. Quite a number among the Balahis are half-professional musicians who are invited by their caste fellows as well as by other people to play at weddings and funerals and on other festive occasions. A few enterprising Balahis have organised a complete music band with European wind instruments which they prefer to the softer string instruments. Their repertoire consists mainly of the most popular cinema hits which they play by ear. There is hardly any one who can read music. A few Balahis accompany their songs on the harmonium.

However, for the usual entertainment in the evening no instruments imported from Europe are required. The Balahis use such instruments which are common all over Central India: as the *sing*, the cymbals, and different kinds of drums. But they are no adepts in playing the Indian zither (*vina*) or violin (*sarangi*), and even the flute is no favourite instrument of theirs.

The *sing* resembles a primitive French-horn without valves. It consists of three parts: a curved narrow brass pipe, about two feet in length, an equally long curved brass or horn funnel, and a brass mouth-piece which is stuck into the thinner end of the narrow brass pipe. The two main pieces are set into one another in such a way that they either form an almost complete circle, or the shape of an S. To prevent a falling apart of the *sing* while blowing it, the broad end of the funnel and the mouth-piece are firmly tied with strings to the ring which joins the funnel with the narrow pipe. Since the *sing* has no valves, only four tunes can be produced by varying the position of the mouth. But anyway no melody is played on the *sing* and the sounds produced resemble much the crowing of guinea-cocks. But these peculiar sounds seem to have some specific significance, since the *sing* should be blown on any festive occasion, especially at weddings and at funerals.

While in the more backward tracts of Central India the *sing* is played by members of several low castes and also by some religious mendicants, in the Nimar District it is the privilege of the Balahis to play the *sing*. This privilege is hereditary in certain families which belong to the clan Singarya. The player of the *sing* receives

annually a certain quantity of grain from those families which require his service at weddings and funerals. The playing of the *sing* appears to have also some magic significance, for many charms and amulets are tied to it to give its blowing more effect.

The *sing* is not manufactured by Balahis, but by a Bohra (Mohammedan) at Fezpur (Burhanpur tahsil) who has inherited this occupation from his forefathers.

Of drums the Balahis mainly use two kinds: the *mirding* and the *tabla*. The *mirding* is a double-membrane drum, in the form of a slightly bulging cylinder. It is about three feet in length and about one to one and a quarter in diameter. The body of the *mirding* is of Bija wood (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) which has a closely grained structure. The body of the drum is made in that way that a solid piece of the trunk of a Bija tree is hollowed out till a frame only a quarter to half an inch thick remains. The open sides of the frame are covered with goat's skins which are straightened by means of strings tied around and across the body of the drum. The tension of the membranes is achieved by tightening the strings by means of wooden wedges which are driven between the strings and the frame of the drum. The pitch of the *mirding* is modified by plastering a flour paste upon the centre of the membranes. The *mirding* is beaten at the left side either with the fingertips or with a small stick, at the right with the fingers and the wrist of the hand. The *mirding* is generally employed for the accompaniment of dancing songs, and may even be carried by the dancers on a string slung over the shoulder. When the drummer sits on the ground he places the drum on his thighs and holds it by pressing it against his body.

The *tabla* (or *dhapla*) consists of a pottery vessel of burnt clay, bowl-like, whose orifice is covered with a goat's skin. The membrane is held in tension by strings around the body of the drum tightened by wooden wedges. The centre of the membrane receives from time to time a paste of flour, to modify the tune of the drum. Two *tablas* are always used simultaneously. Both drums are placed conveniently near before the drummer who sits on the ground. The singer of the so-called *kathas* and *bhajans* (ballads and hymns) always uses the *tabla* for his accompaniment.

Very popular among Balahi musicians are cymbals which are called *ghanjh*. They consist of two brass cups, held in the hollow of the hand, and are beaten together to the rhythm of the drums. Since the beating of the *ghanjh* produces an almost ear-splitting though not altogether unpleasant sound the cymbals are not beaten when a single man is singing.

### (3) Dancing

If the Balahis ever used to dance in groups, after the fashion of the aboriginal tribes, they have long since abandoned it. They may sometimes imitate the *dandya* dance (stick dance) of the Rajputs and other castes, but in general the Balahis do not dance in groups. When they dance, they dance either *solo* or in pairs, rarely with a third partner. Men and women never dance together, and men are not even allowed to be present when the women dance.

When a Balahi male dances *solo*, he is dressed as a dancing girl; when two men dance, one is dressed as a woman. Only the *bhagat* of the *Dhaj mata* and the *Kati mata* (mendicant worshippers of the Earth mother and the Cotton mother) have a special dancing costume which is described in chapter V.

The Balahis dance the traditional dances of India, but as few of them are properly trained in any of the different schools, their art is only a more or less faithful imitation of the current dance forms. Few know the meaning of the various movements of hands and feet in Indian dancing so that their expression in gesture and pantomime of what is sung or played is rather haphazard and amateurish.

The dance of Balahi women consists only of a few stereotype movements, and has no connection with the accompanying music and singing; their dancing is not pantomime, but routine. Women dance, bowing low from the hips. With one hand they hold the corner of their scarf, while the other hand moves in rhythmic touching alternately forehead, chest, and hip. The *solo* dancers move in a circle, either to the right or to the left, placing one foot close to the other, then stepping with one foot sideways and drawing the other after. The man who dances the female role in a duetto, imitates usually the dance forms of the Balahi women.

The dancer either performs in silence, or he may lead the singing. The other people sit around and sing or beat the drums, or join in singing the refrain. But most of the lookers-on are content with watching the performance and listening to the songs without taking any active part themselves. When a dancer is tired he sits down for a while and another takes his place. In every Balahi village there are several men and women who, according to Balahi standards, are fairly accomplished dancers. Boys and girls are encouraged to take a try, either imitating reputed dancers or dancing alone as well as possible in the absence of a skilled dancer. Nobody laughs or mocks at clumsy attempts or discourages a beginner, but every venture in learning the art of dancing receives plenty of encouragement.

The art of dancing is highly esteemed by the Balahis. While for ordinary occasions dancers are available in every village, for

more festive performances sometimes an accomplished dancer from outside is invited. Such guests are well paid for their art. There are quite a few Balahis who for a good part of the year go from village to village and dance for the entertainment of the villagers.

When after long song recitals and a number of dances performers as well as audience are in a highly strung mood of mind, they demand as a climax a dramatic performance. Popular themes for the stage are episodes from the history of their favourite gods Rama and Krishna, stories related in the Ramayana or Premasagar. These religious scenes are enacted in the desire to express more drastically than by mere song recitals the religious emotions of performers and audience. But the Balahis apparently cannot stand for long the strain of high emotions, they soon need relaxation from the tiresome effort of thinking. Therefore they intersperse their song recitals and dance-evenings by comic acts, apt to divert the highly excited mind by contrast. The subjects of these comic acts are the playful and often rather dubious adventures of Krishna, or humorous episodes of every-day life, which are depicted by the actors with great relish and are much applauded by their spell-bound audience.

Popular themes with Balahis must have either a rather strong erotic touch, or depict such vices and foibles of the world the representation of which is apt to arouse their laughter. To make their impersonation the more effective, the actors strongly exaggerate human defects which incite the ridicule of the audience. Favourite themes are the arrogance of the Brahmans, the corruption of government officials (especially the police), and the exploitation of the simple villagers is depicted with vivid realism. Other popular subjects of Balahi plays are the hypocrisy of the Hindu Sadhus, the vanity of women, the deceits of the merchants and the oppression of the money-lenders, the wiles of a bad woman and the folly of a stupid husband. A Balahi audience appreciates it especially if the proud Brahman, the arrogant official, the oppressive money-lender, the hypocrite Sadhu, are shamed and deceived by the stupid-sly, humble, ragged Balahi *kotwal* who, never absent in a Balahi cast, generally plays the main role.

Balahi plays are generally improvised, only the main outline of the play is roughly sketched beforehand by the actors. The comic plays are all short, and require only a few actors, no scenery and only a slight disguise or make-up. The audience does not demand much action, but a lively dialogue with plenty of jests and much buffoonery, verbal quibbles and dubious allusions. The men will roar with laughter, and the women snigger into their scarfs, and all will enjoy themselves immensely. These short comic plays invariably end

in a song and dance by the actors, while the audience joins in singing the refrain and in hand-clapping to the rhythm of the dance.

Sometimes a rich village *patel* or land-lord invites a group of professionals to give a performance in the village. These artists present religious dramas (*natak*) as well as comedies. But of course they do not perform for the poor untouchable Balahis who at such performances are only permitted to sit at the back and at a distance from the caste people.

#### (4) The Economic Sphere of Social Life

##### (a) Exchange of Goods: Gifts

The Balahis are not used to giving presents of value to anybody but close relatives. Guests invited for a wedding or funeral feast are expected to bring along a more or less valuable present. Frequently, relatives and friends exchange small presents of fruits, or choice dishes specially prepared for a feast-day. Needy relatives and servants (in the rare case when a Balahi can afford to employ a servant) are occasionally given grain or clothes. Sadhus (religious mendicants) and beggars seldom go away without having received a small gift, a handful of grain or flour, or a small coin. The Balahis believe that for each *anna* given in alms God will reward them with a rupee! Another motive for the practice of charity is the fear that beggars and Sadhus may curse them if sent away empty-handed.

With the exception of such occasional alms, Balahi charity is generally limited to members of their own caste. The sense of any obligation for helping outsiders and strangers is conspicuously absent. This is, at least partly, due to the low social and economical status of the Balahis. It is they who are in need of help! And then, many persons of a higher social status would decline to accept the offered help of the untouchable Balahi. In this connection the happening, related above, may be recalled of some Balahis who told me that they had seen an old woman on the road, lying in the dust, very sick and almost dying. When I asked them whether they had rendered any assistance to the poor woman, and at least offered her a glass of water, they replied: "How could we? The woman was not of our caste and a stranger." It is very probable that the woman would have declined the offer of a drink after hearing that they were Balahis.

The Balahis are, in their majority, desperately poor and therefore often compelled to ask for a loan of money or for alms from more fortunate people of the village. But the Balahis often lack that fine sense of gratitude which makes people appreciate a gift and do something in return for it. Balahis often accept a gift as if they

had a right for demanding it and often grumble for having been given so little. Once a man made the experiment of finding out when Balahi beggars really would be satisfied. So next time a Balahi beggar came and asked for alms, the man gave him a small coin. The Balahi accepted the coin, but said that it was hardly enough for a meal. The man gave him another coin. The Balahi took it without thanks and pointed at his torn shirt. He asked whether no old shirt were available for him. When he got a shirt, he begged also for a loin-cloth! But now patience failed the donor and he chased away the intrepid beggar. The latter went away complaining bitterly that people were so unkind and stingy that his children were dying of starvation!

In asking a favour of anybody, the Balahis, like other Indians, prefer an indirect advance to a direct request. They regard it a breach of etiquette to ask point-blank for anything. Balahis who are asked immediately after they have come what they want, will invariably give the reply: "Nothing!" Once I forgot and asked a Balahi before he had time to sit down, what he wanted. The man replied: "Sahib, don't talk in this curt way. I cannot say straight away what I want from you. Let us first sit down and have a chat. That is our custom!" I smiled, invited him to take a seat and waited patiently till the man found that the psychological moment had arrived to present his request. Although the Balahis are, as a rule, not at all bashful in demanding favours and sometimes come forward with incredible demands, they always try to wrap up their requests pleasantly. Often they send a go-between or bring along some friends who will plead for them.

According to Balahi etiquette it is sadly lacking in courtesy if one refuses a request with a simple, direct "No!" Such a blunt reply makes a man lose his face, a serious insult even among the Balahis. They usually take it quite cheerfully if a negative reply is enclosed in an excuse, which defers the granting of the request to a later or more convenient date. If after a second or third repetition of the request the same delaying answer is given, the Balahis understand quite well its meaning and take it as a polite kind of refusal. No Balahi will feel much annoyed if a promise given is not made good. The failure to redeem a promise is only a sign that there was no intention of granting the request.

Another subtle way of asking for gifts is to praise and to extol the value of an article before its owner. If the latter is not willing to part with it, he will belittle its value or find another reason why at present he cannot give it away. This custom also explains why a mother dislikes it so much when the beauty or strength of her baby is praised. She may take it as an expression of envy or ill-will.

The Balahis are convinced that their children will sicken or perhaps even die, as if a spell were cast on them, on account of such ill-placed paises. They are sure that any one can, by expressing a strong desire for an object in the possession of another man, cast a spell on the coveted article and make the owner lose it.

#### (b) Sale and Purchase

The Balahis have seldom anything to sell, and buy little more than their provisions at the weekly market. Their wages are generally paid in grain by their employers, so that they never have much money on hand. Only the weavers go to the bazaar to sell their cloth woven during the week. Still, the bazaar has great attractions for the Balahis who take a delight in endless bargaining. Some Balahis often go to market with no intention of buying anything, but just for the pleasure of assisting others in bargaining or watching them over-reaching each other.

However, the Balahis themselves are not very shrewd in striking a bargain and are generally the losers in their transactions with merchants and traders. The purchase of their weekly provisions is a relatively safe matter, since the prices for grain and spices are more or less the same all over the bazaar. But when it comes to the sale of their cotton or grain harvest, or the sale or purchase of a field, or a pair of bullocks, the Balahis are easily cheated. A Balahi farmer, for instance, who has cotton for sale, likes a bit of gambling in selling his harvest. Cotton merchants who come to the villages for the purchase of cotton, roughly estimate the amount a farmer has for sale, and offer a lump sum for the whole lot without taking the trouble of weighing it exactly. The farmer who accepts the offer may gain considerably if the merchant has made a mistake and over-estimated the amount of cotton before him. But usually it is the farmer who loses by accepting a lower price than he ought to demand. It is said that cotton merchants get more profit from this method of buying by estimate than from the resale of the cotton purchased.

Balahis who own a pair of bullocks frequently sell them if what they consider a fair price is offered. They gamble on the chance of finding a better pair of bullocks somewhere for the same price. But often they find to their disappointment that they have made a mistake! Balahis also like to visit the annual fairs held at some sacred shrine. These fairs are at the same time also the favourite cattle markets of the district. Balahis who drive a pair of bullocks to the fair, often return with another but rarely with a better pair of bullocks. The Lashkarias, a caste of nomadic blacksmiths, who wander from village to village repairing agricultural

tools etc., are also shrewd cattle traders. They never buy a bullock against cash but only sell one of their own or exchange one for another. Even when they exchange their bullocks, they never do it without some gain, and were it only a handful of tobacco. These clever Lashkarias are very fond of making a bargain with the Balahis who are usually hopelessly cheated. Once I watched a Lashkaria for a whole afternoon exchanging bullock for bullock in a Balahi village. In the evening the man had made so much money that he must have felt some remorse for he sent to the nearest bazaar and bought sweets for the Balahi children of the whole village. Thus he meant to make some sort of restitution for his too successful transactions.

Sometimes Balahis are in urgent need of money but cannot get a loan. In such a case they sell a pair of good bullocks and buy an inferior pair for a cheaper price, the balance being more or less sufficient to meet their needs.

In the making of purchases the Balahis observe a certain distinction between the sexes. A woman should not even for her own use buy cloth or silver ornaments. Her husband or another near male relative will choose the cloth or the ornaments that a woman is going to wear. Even a widow may ask a male relative to make such purchases for her though it is she who provides the money. But cooking pots and earthen vessels, and other household implements, are purchased by women. The weekly provisions may be bought by men and women alike.

Certain Balahi clans are prohibited by clan laws from purchasing certain articles, in particular those which are believed to adorn the clan god (goddess). These rules are described in the chapter on clan-gods and their worship.

Balahis, as a rule, show a certain aversion to trade with their own caste men. For the latter try to take advantage of their relationship by fixing the lowest price possible when buying from a fellow Balahi. Frequently they also expect that payment should be deferred to a more convenient day.

### (c) Loans

The majority of the Balahis are desperately poor and in constant need of help from fellow villagers and caste fellows. One borrows from the other small cash, grain, and other foodstuff, agricultural tools, even clothes and shoes. Generally no interest is charged on such small loans. But many Balahis are in the habit of never returning a borrowed article unless it is demanded back by the owner, hoping no doubt that the latter might forget all about it. Usually

they do not succeed, for Balahis have an unusually good memory for the smallest article they have loaned to anyone. On the other hand, a man must be careful not to get the reputation of never returning what he borrows, for in that case nobody will ever lend him anything.

The Balahis are generally very reluctant to lend a big sum of money to a caste fellow. For they find it often difficult to apply the pressure which is required on a debtor who fails to repay his debt at the stipulated time. If a Balahi creditor goes to court the other Balahis may call him a blood-sucker and feel inclined to make life difficult for him. The only case known to me when a Nimar Balahi tried his luck as a money-lender on a large scale ended in a dismal failure. The man gave several hundreds of rupees on loan to fellow Balahis for the usual rate of interest (25 per cent). But when after the harvest he went round to collect his loans and the interest, everybody refused to repay him. Many of the debtors refused even to pay the yearly interest, a thing which no proper money-lender ever allows. The Balahi could not go to court, for though he might have won his case he would have lost his good name. It took him years to recover even a part of the money he had given on loan.

Only a man who is not reluctant to take the law into his own hand will get his money back. However, there are Balahis who freely give small scale loans to their caste fellows. They usually also charge the same exorbitant rates of interest which Pathan money-lenders demand (up to 25 per cent per month!). Such loans are short-term loans which must be repaid at once after the harvest. If necessary, their repayment is exacted under threats of force. Such petty money-lenders often employ Mohammedan lads who for a small fee are willing to beat up a tardy debtor. Of course, only Balahis who care nothing for their reputation can make money in this way.

Like other farmers of the district, the Balahi land-owners too must give loans of food grain and cash to their permanent field servants and to occasional labourers. For even the daily labourers of a village demand an advance of cash or grain just before the rush of work in the sowing, weeding, or harvesting season. However, Balahi farmers often find it more difficult than others, to get hands working on their fields, for the high-caste farmers of the village are always served first. Only after they are satisfied, will field servants go to work on the fields of their Balahi creditors.

## Part III — Life History of the Individual

### Chapter IX

#### Birth and Childhood

##### (1) Introduction to Sexual Life

For the young people among the Balahis, boys as well as girls, there is no formal initiation into sexual life. There is one feast, *Janm Ashtami* (Krishna's birth festival), when the Balahi Sadhu may conduct a rite which bears resemblance to an initiation ceremony. But the ceremony is not performed on all children and for many on whom it is performed it is a mere formality without practical value. The Balahis have no circumcision.

However, Balahi children obtain an early knowledge of sex matters from the talk and conduct of their parents and other near relatives who speak freely and openly of such things even in ordinary conversation. At night, the parents, the married brothers with their wives, and the unmarried children, all sleep together in the same narrow hut. There the children naturally become aware of everything that takes place and very early acquire a knowledge of sexual matters. The ritual of birth and marriage ceremonies contains songs about the most intimate details of married life, and their enactment favours the discussion of such topics. The children are, of course, interested listeners and are not excluded from such gatherings. Small children are even allowed to attend the birth of a child. I know of one small boy who was expressly called home from school as his mother was having a baby. He watched the event with greatest interest and afterwards was able to repeat every detail of the child's arrival and his mother's behaviour to his amused audience in school. When the women attending the birth were reproached for having allowed the boy to witness the birth, they shrugged their shoulders and said: "He is only a baby; what does he understand!" However, bigger children are not permitted to be present at a birth though, of course, much depends on the circumstances and on the feeling of the Balahi family in which the child is born.

Children acquire further sexual knowledge from expressions which the Balahis, as also the other caste people, use very often, even in the most ordinary tasks and actions, and which have reference to the most intimate sexual organs and actions, or their abuse. In times of excitement and anger or during a quarrel terms are used which leave nothing hidden regarding the sexual life and its abuse. Children hear all these expressions daily and very often

use them too, at first without knowing their meaning which they learn soon enough. Their parents do not punish children for using such expressions; indeed they often take delight in hearing their little ones swear and abuse. "Look!" they say, "how our youngster can curse and swear though he is still so small!" — If any child lacks knowledge in such matters the older boys and girls will not be slow to enlighten them or even lead them to abuse in the same way. It is said that small children sometimes imitate the sexual acts of their parents by, as they say, playing 'father and mother'. Their parents frown on them, though indulgently, if they see them acting in this way.

From early childhood the Balahi, as every low-caste Hindu, is sex-conscious. The first thing that even the smaller children look for, when a dog has puppies is: "Is it a male or female?" For them a horse is not just a horse, it is a stallion or a mare; a dog is either a he-dog or a bitch. Balahis never make mistakes in regard to this. But this all-dominating sex-consciousness forbids all casual intimacy, even the most harmless contact, between persons of the opposite sex. And the Balahis take it for granted that a man who simply smiles at a woman or girl is making amatory advances.

Sexual intercourse between half-grown boys and girls occurs, but not very frequently, since from childhood they are separated at play and at work. It is more frequent that boys or girls learn homosexual practices from their older companions, and this especially during the hot season when there is little work to do and the children remain the whole day out on the fields grazing the cattle. There they are left to themselves without supervision. Love-affairs between adolescent boys and girls are relatively rare because girls go to live with their husbands at a very early age, indeed soon after their first menstruation. But child-widows who are permitted to remarry only after coming to maturity are often secretly courted by unmarried youths or young men whose wives are still too young for married life. And, as the boys say, these girls amply return their attentions.

The Balahis have no puberty rites for boys, nor any special ceremonies for reception into the caste on their attaining maturity. The Balahi boys attain puberty generally at the age of 13 to 16 years. They change much mentally and physically within a short time. During puberty they grow rapidly. The pleasantly plump and almost girlishly soft features of a Balahi boy before puberty become coarse and clumsy, the pale brown complexion of their skin gets a dark hue, in stature they become thin and over-grown. Mentally they change even more: the merry, soft-hearted, slightly girlish boys of early childhood become rough and clumsy, and very sensual lads.

The girls do not change so rapidly. Even after their first menstruation they retain long their girlish character. But after some time when they have begun to live with their husbands they begin to grow and to blossom and frequently develop into attractive young women.

(2) The First Menstruation (*kapre siyai*)<sup>29)</sup>

A special ceremony is performed when a girl attains the age of puberty and has her first menstruation. As soon as the menstruation takes place, the girl is separated and secluded in a corner of the house. There she must remain hidden for the next few days, and she must especially avoid being seen by men, even her nearest male relatives. She is not permitted to comb her hair or to wash herself. She is regarded as unclean, and all she touches is polluted. She may not cook or carry water. She takes her meals apart from the family. She is permitted to leave the house only for calls of nature, and that only in the dark, either before dawn or after sunset. Similar rules apply, in a more lenient form, to every following menstruation. During such periods women are considered unclean and are not allowed to perform their household duties. But they may go to the fields for work.

On the fourth or fifth day the menstruating girl goes, accompanied by the older womenfolk of the family, to the well or river in order to purify herself. There she bathes and changes her clothes which she washes herself. The women who help her to bathe must also take a bath and wash their clothes because by touching the girl they too have become unclean. After that all return home, cleansed from all effects of menstruation.

It appears that the Balahis do not know the physiological cause of menstruation, nor have they any mythical explanation for it. The men say: "It's a women's affair! They always must have something special!" and find it rather annoying that the women have every month a time when they cannot cook or carry water for the household. However, the Balahis are well aware that with beginning pregnancy a woman ceases to have her monthly period. During menstruation sexual intercourse is forbidden.

It is customary that soon after the first menstruation, on the second or third day following, the parents of the girl's husband are informed of the event and invited to fetch her to her husband's house. According to Balahi custom the girl has long since been married, but she has not yet begun to live with her boy husband. Her married

<sup>29)</sup> *kapre siyai* probably derives from *kapre se hai* or *kapre se hota* which means: coming from the clothes.

life will now begin. People believe that unless the girl is brought to her husband and begins to live with him soon after her first menstruation, she will become sterile. But another reason for the early consummation of the marriage is fear for the good name of the girl and her parents. Sexual intercourse, outside wedlock, especially if pregnancy ensues, is a great dishonour and shame for the girl and her family. And there is a great danger of such an eventuality for the girl usually lives in the same house and room with many male relatives. Moreover, Balahi girls are not kept in seclusion but go out to work in the fields and, consequently, have many opportunities to slip away for a meeting with a secret lover. Though boys and girls are kept apart in daily life by the division of work which keeps them occupied at different places, and public opinion does not tolerate the meetings of adolescent boys and girls, there are many occasions for secret rendezvous.

The Balahis believe that after the first menstruation strong sexual impulses arise in a girl so that she begins to neglect her duties and soon gives way to such impulses and desires. For this reason parents are anxious to send a daughter to her young husband as soon as possible so that she can satisfy such impulses in a lawful manner. The parents of the girl's husband too are usually quite ready to receive a daughter-in-law into their family, indeed so valuable is a helping hand in their field and house that they usually invite her parents to send the girl even before the first menstruation has taken place. This happens in particular when the husband of the girl is already grown up and anxious to start a family of his own.

Only a girl whose husband has died in infancy may remain with her parents for a longer period. But also for her the parents soon begin to make arrangements for a second marriage, afraid lest the girl may bring shame upon them unless they allow her to gratify her sexual impulse by marriage. And there is indeed much reason for anxiety; for the Balahis themselves admit that adolescent girls have nothing else on their minds but how to satisfy their sexual desires. But in this respect boys are not much different from girls and an early consummation of the marriage appears to the Balahis the best means to escape unpleasant and extremely embarrassing situations which are otherwise sure to ensue.

However, old people still speak of the times when a Balahi girl was not married before her 16th year. Child-marriage appears to be a relatively recent introduction among the Balahis. It can generally be observed in Central India that tribes and castes which formerly did not practice child-marriage are introducing it now to conform with the traditional practice of the high-caste Hindus. The practice of early marriages is introduced even among the aboriginal Bhils and

Korkus, while among the higher Hindu castes there is a tendency to delay the marriage of their sons and daughters till they leave school. Some Balahis deplore the evil consequences of early marriages which often exhaust the vitality of the young couples and precipitate the young women into motherhood when they are still physically unfit to giving birth to strong and healthy children. But present custom decrees otherwise and no Balahi will act contrary to customs and traditions which are universally observed by the higher castes of the country <sup>40</sup>).

No statistics are available about the age of girls at their first menstruation. Between 13 and 16 years seems to be the most common age, since girls are rarely sent to their husbands earlier than that.

### (3) Pregnancy and Child-birth

In the following table is given the age of 200 mothers at the birth of their first child. The dates were taken from the official Baptism Registers of the R. Catholic Missions at Khandwa and Aulia and may claim more correctness than the usual statistics of the Census Reports which give the age of women and children only approximately.

Age of mothers at the birth of their first child:

Age of mothers:	No. of women:	Age of mothers:	No. of women:
12	3	20	16
13	10	21	8
14	11	22	5
15	21	23	5
16	29	24	1
17	31	25	1
18	34	26	5
19	19	27	1

According to these statistics the average age of Balahi girls at the birth of their first child is 17 years and six months. This corresponds roughly with the statistics of Balahi women collected by the

<sup>40</sup>) How completely the Balahis have conformed to the Hindu custom of child marriage, is shown in the records of the Census of India 1931: of 80 castes in the Central Provinces only 14 had a higher percentage of girls married below the age of 13 than the Balahis. (Census of India 1931: vol. XII, part I, p. 180). Of 27,481 Balahi females 2,714 (or 10 per cent) were already married below the age of 13. Of all Balahi males between the age of seven to thirteen 16.5 per cent were married, while there were 44 per cent married in the same age group of Balahi females. (Census of India 1931: vol. XII, part I, p. 200).

Census Officer of Holkar State in 1941. His figures are, however, not quite exact since the age of the mothers was not certain and had in many cases to be guessed.

Age of mothers at the birth of their first child:

Age of mothers:	No. of women:	Age of mothers:	No. of women:
12	167	27	38
13	257	28	63
14	1,071	29	23
15	2,858	30	126
16	4,393	31	2
17	2,281	32	11
18	5,774	33	10
19	1,604	34	6
20	3,975	35	15
21	407	36	5
22	653	37	1
23	142	38	4
24	226	39	—
25	444	40	9
26	39	41	—
		42	1

The average age of Balahi women in Holkar State at the birth of their first child is thus 17 years and 10 months. Or, if only the years between 12 and 27 are considered (as in the previous table) the average age is 17 years and 8 months.

These statistics show that most Balahi girls give birth to their first child between the ages of 16 and 19 years. Premature births and miscarriages, however, are not included in these tables. It is said that many young wives have miscarriages or give birth to children prematurely, a fact which is not surprising since a young girl's body is not yet fully developed at such an early age and consequently cannot always bear the strain of pregnancy. However, it cannot be maintained that early pregnancy is mainly the cause of sickness and sterility of Balahi women. It may often to a certain degree impair their health; but the harm done by a too early beginning of child-bearing is somewhat mitigated by the custom of allowing a young woman frequent visits to her parents in whose home she can rest and recuperate. Furthermore, custom does not compel her to spend her whole time within the narrow walls of an unhealthy home, but much of her life is passed out of doors in the fresh air, an advantage which is often denied to her otherwise more privileged sisters of the higher castes.

When her body is fully developed, a Balahi woman generally gives birth to healthy and strong children. The high mortality among

babies is due largely to lack of care and hygiene as well as to lack of proper nourishment. The children usually do well as long as the mother can feed them sufficiently. But after a few months, when the mother's milk dries up, the babies often become weak and undernourished; the Balahis rarely can afford the luxury of cow's milk for their children; rice-water mixed with *gur*, and the hardly digestible *joari* bread are the only substitutes for a mother's milk. If the babies in this state of undernourishment get sick, they naturally often succumb and die. Lack of nourishment is also the reason why twins so seldom survive the first year of life. The mother is often relieved if one of the twins dies soon after birth so that the surviving baby can be fed properly. But only too often both twins die one after the other.

Balahi women have as a rule many children. Two hundred Balahi women of the Nimar District questioned as to the number of their children, had born altogether 837 children, which is on the average more than four for each woman. Among these women there were many who had not yet reached their menopause and therefore had a fair chance of giving birth to more children. According to the Census Report of the Holkar State 1941, 3103 women of the Balahi caste aged 45 and over were questioned as to the number of children they had born. In the average a hundred women had born 672 children! It is not exceptional for a Balahi woman to give birth to ten and more children. But the mortality in large families is very high.

Balahi women age quickly and appear to stop bearing children soon after reaching the age of thirty-five. The average age of 50 mothers at the time when they had given birth to their last child was 35 years. However, it was impossible to ascertain the reason for this early sterility. In some cases the husband may have become sick or sterile, or the woman may have become barren for other reasons. The highest age on the records, available to me, of a mother at child-birth was 48 years. (There is no doubt about the exact age of this Balahi woman because her age was recorded in the Baptism Register of the Catholic Mission at Khandwa.) According to statistics, it appears that those mothers who bore their first child at an early age ceased relatively early having children. Of forty mothers who had born their first child between the age of 14 to 17 years the average bore their last child at 26 years and 11 months. The oldest mother among them was forty when her last child was born.

The Balahis want as many children as possible. Sterility is considered a disgrace, a curse of the gods. Women who have no children visit famous temples, the gods of fecundity are invoked, coconuts are offered under a sacred *pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*). Sometimes a bedstead *en miniature* is constructed and hung on the branches of the

tree, or placed under it. Childless women also have recourse to magic and witchcraft to obtain their heart's desire. Or they call a *sadhu* to pray and recite incantations over them.

The Balahis, of course, understand the connection between sexual intercourse and pregnancy. They know that the body of the child is formed in the mother's womb in nine months' time. This growth is described, as the Balahis picture it to themselves, in a song (*mangal*) which is recited during the funeral feast. In the first month, the Balahis say, the foetus is *nirmal* (like water). In the second month the blood is formed: *palita khira*. In the third month the blood becomes thick: *rahat ka dala*. In the fourth month the flesh is formed: *mās ka gola*. In the fifth month the hands and feet are developed: *pawn nang sidhare*. In the sixth month the body is completed: *ang ko sidhare*. In the seventh month the body begins to live and to move: *ulad muk chhula*. In the eighth month the foetus is complete and merely floats in the fluid of the uterus: *athyasi ko nahe*. Then in the ninth month birth takes place: *nau dwara paya*: the boat is launched!

The Balahis believe that the seventh month is a critical month when many abortions and miscarriages take place. At that time therefore pregnant women wear amulets which are obtained from the *barwa* (magician). The amulet should not be removed till after the child's birth, when it is thrown into a river. The *barwa*, of course, must receive gifts for the amulet, according to the means of the pregnant woman's husband. However, should the amulet prove unsuccessful in preventing an abortion, the amulet is discarded in disappointment, and abuses and invectives are heaped upon the inefficient *barwa*. It often occurs that a pregnant woman fearing to have a miscarriage in this critical month makes a vow to go on pilgrimage or to present gifts to a *sadhu* or temple in order to ward off the dreaded calamity.

As to the origin of the child's soul, the Balahis are ignorant. They commonly believe, with other Hindus, in the transmigration of souls. Usually they do not bother much about the soul of a child, but when directly questioned on this point they usually say that in their opinion the soul comes from Bhagwan. They maintain that Bhagwan has created only a limited number of souls which have been reborn ever since.

The Balahis believe that under certain circumstances a woman may become pregnant also without sexual intercourse (Cf. the myth of the origin of the first Balahi, the son of Sakati), by taking a bath in a full-moon night or by passing under a Mango tree in flower, and there are several stories current among the Balahis of women having conceived after sexual intercourse with *bhuts* (demons). The children of such a union are born either with monstrous deformities or possess magical powers.

## Chapter X

## Birth of the Child

## (1) The Day of Birth

As soon as the mother begins to feel the pangs of birth, she receives *ghi* (clarified butter) and *urad* (*Phaseolus radiatus* — a pulse) to eat. Soon the mid-wife is called in. The mid-wife (*dai*, or *dayan* in the Nimari dialect) is always a Balahi. The Nimar Balahis, contrary to the custom of the Katia Balahis who take their mid-wives from the Sweeper caste, have mid-wives of their own caste. In this respect the Nimar Balahis feel themselves superior to the Katia Balahis because they do not allow their women to be touched by a *mehtrani* though in other regards they are considered inferior to the Katias.

A Balahi *dai* receives no training in obstetrics to qualify her for her task. She may have learned to attend women in child-birth because her mother was a mid-wife; but any woman who is willing to practice mid-wifery may do so. It is not necessary that she is in any way more intelligent or more skilled in her task than other women. On the contrary, mid-wifery is regarded as an "unclean" work and, consequently, respectable women are reluctant to attend women other than near relatives in child-birth. The opprobrium consists mainly in accepting money for services rendered to a woman in child-birth. A woman who helps a relative or neighbour in having a baby has only to take a bath afterwards and she is 'clean', but professional mid-wives who accept payment and attend also women of other castes do not stand high in the opinion of the people. No wonder, therefore, that few Balahi women feel a vocation for mid-wifery. And really skilled mid-wives are extremely rare. In Ganesh-talai for instance, a suburb of Khandwa, the *dai* is an old woman, almost blind and deaf, and of unclean habits. In another village, 20 miles from Khandwa, there are two mid-wives who attend Balahi as well as high-caste women of the villages in the neighbourhood. One of them is old, half-blind and below average intelligence. The other one is indeed clever and well versed in applying quack medicines, but she is also the 'bad woman' of the village. Though the mother of ten children, she has given great scandal to the villagers by loose living. She is also said to be an adept in preparing poisonous drugs which she supplies for a high fee to people who require them. In another village no woman was willing to act as a mid-wife. The village *panch* therefore ordered a young girl to be the mid-wife of the village. For some time the girl was forced to attend every delivery in the village and to lend a helping hand till she was found competent enough and willing to follow this vocation.

When called to attend a delivery, the *dayan* puts on her worst and dirtiest rags since all her clothes become unclean through the touch of the woman in child-birth. As the only professional instrument she brings a sickle with which to cut the umbilical cord. Other women may also attend but they lend their assistance only in a more remote manner and if possible avoid touching the woman in child-birth. When the delivery is near, the woman in labour squats on her heels on the ground. At an easy birth the *dayan* has very little to do. She just takes the child when it comes 'out of the prison', as the Balahis say, and lays it down on a sheet spread on the floor. For the new-born child must first be put on the lap of Mother Earth! With her sickle the *dai* then cuts the umbilical cord (*aher*). This is called *nala katna*, i. e. the cutting of the tube. But it is customary that the mother, even if she cannot cut the cord herself, makes at least the first incision. The cutting of the umbilical cord is considered particularly polluting unless performed by the mother herself. Among the Katia Balahis this operation is performed by a Sweeper woman; not even the child's mother can do it. It happened some years ago that a Katia woman bore a child attended by a Nimar Balahi mid-wife. When it came to the cutting of the umbilical cord, the attending *dai* insisted on the mother making at least the first incision which the parturient woman refused to do. The women could not come to terms and thus the umbilical cord was not cut at all. While the after-birth was disposed of by the *dai*, the child carried the umbilical cord on its body till it dried up and fell off by itself.

If the *dai* cuts the umbilical cord, she gets a fee of four annas (in case of a boy) or of two annas (for a girl) immediately after the operation. The wound is rubbed with *haldi* (turmeric) to prevent infection. The umbilical cord is wrapped around the neck of the baby and removed only after five days. Then it is buried carefully somewhere in the court-yard to prevent another woman from getting hold of it and using it for magical purposes which might endanger the life of the newborn child. If the birth is difficult and the labour protracted, the mid-wife helps as best as she can. She massages the body of the woman in labour and pulls and presses with all her strength. If, in spite of all these devices, all hope of a successful delivery is lost, she tries to tear the child from the mother's womb with her bare hands. Or she cuts the body inside the womb into pieces and removes the parts. In some cases mother and child are left to die together.

Very seldom, a man who has the reputation of a quack, may be called in as a last resort. His eyes are blind-folded to prevent his seeing the woman. But usually also his service avails mother

and child but little in these circumstances. Even if the child is born, the mother often dies after a few days from the injuries received by the violent practices employed in assisting the birth.

Sometimes, when human ingenuity proves insufficient, the *dai* takes refuge to magical practices in order to facilitate the birth. A golden nose-ring (*nath*) of a newly married girl is interlaced in the hair-knot of the woman in travail. Sometimes if no golden nose-ring is at hand, a certain root (*unt kanta*) is used. It is smeared with a paste of rice and *kuku* (a red powder contained in the fruit of *Mallotus philippinensis*), before it is tied in the hair-knot. As soon as the child is born, these amulets must be removed, else the mother is believed to lose too much blood.

If the child is born dead or there is a miscarriage, the *dai* shows the body to the father, not to the mother. The remains are buried without ceremony in a corner of the court-yard, or thrown on a dung-heap. A foetus is not regarded as a human being, and a deformed child is always killed and secretly buried to avoid the gossip of the village. In one village where a Balahi woman had an abortion, the still-born foetus was only about six inches in size. The mother gave it to her half-grown boy and told him to bury it in a dung-heap. But the boy showed it to all his play-mates who tossed it about and played with it. When they got tired of playing they simply threw the body away in the jungle where a dog found and devoured it. The woman was the target of the village gossip for a few days and was teased good-humouredly till some other event attracted the attention of the village community.

Sometimes the mid-wife is called to procure an abortion. It is true that most Balahis want and like to have many children. But if the child is the result of illicit intercourse, for instance, of a widow or of an unmarried girl, the *dai* is frequently approached to do away with the unwelcome child. For in case of an illegitimate birth the child cannot be kept by the mother, but must be disposed of before its mother can be reconciled to the caste community. The most convenient way of getting rid of the child is to let it die at the moment of delivery. For a small extra-remuneration the *dayan* may be brought to lend her help in this matter.

Abortions are said to be procured quite frequently. If a woman has already many children and is afraid of child-birth, or if she has a quarrel with her husband and wants to revenge herself, but most often when the discovery of an illicit intimacy is feared from an inopportune birth, an abortion is desired and this is procured with no uneasy conscience. Though such practices are more or less strongly disapproved by the community, they do not call for punishment by the village *panch*.

Drugs for procuring an abortion are usually to be had from the hawkers who wander from village to village and sell quack medicines, also from Korku and Gond women and other aboriginals who know certain herbs with abortive effects. But generally the mid-wives of the Balahis have their own recipe for the preparation of such mixtures. For instance: They mix two or three eggs with three years old jaggery (coarse, dark-coloured sugar) and black *tilli* (*Sesamum indicum*). If this mixture is taken early in the morning for a few consecutive days, the abortion is certain to take place. Another popular abortive is *kulthi* (a kind of pulse) which is boiled and left to stand for three to five days. It is more effective if mixed with bamboo dust, black pepper, and three years old jaggery (*gur*). Instead of *kulthi* the fruits of *Anjun* (*Terminalia arjuna*) do as well. Also *mahua* fruits (*Bassia latifolia* Roxb.) which have been boiled are said to be effective. The seeds of *papaya* (*Carica papaya*) are also used as an abortive medicine.

These medicines, and the secret assistance of the mid-wife make it unlikely that an unwanted child is born alive. Balahi women frequently realise that these drugs and herbs are dangerous to their health and are apt to make a woman using them sterile. But since it is generally a widow who is in need of such 'medicine', she does not much care if she becomes sterile after she has lost all hope of remarriage.

The Balahis call it an easy birth when the head of the baby comes out first. If the baby is born with the feet foremost the birth is generally a difficult one. Children born in such a manner are believed to be particularly susceptible to be struck by lightning during a thunder-storm. Therefore during a storm such a person should not have sexual intercourse with his married partner, because in such a situation both are likely to be killed immediately by lightning. If the child lies crosswise in the womb it is considered certain that only death can result for the child, and often also for the mother. As a rule, however, deliveries are quick and easy. The organism of the young mother is flexible and the body of a Balahi baby, even the head, is usually very small. The delivery as such is commonly no great risk to mother or child, but it is the assistance of the mid-wife which provides the element of danger. It often happens that a mother gets puerperal fever because of the dirtiness of the mid-wife who in her manipulations has infected the mother. A good number of women die in child-bed or are ailing a long time after child-birth. Some mid-wives know certain medicines which appear to be very helpful in puerperal fever, but they usually charge heavily for their potions. They are even said to delay a cure with the intention of prolonging their assistance and increasing their remuneration.

If the delivery has been successful the placenta is buried in secrecy so that no other woman may find and use it as a charm or for magical purposes both of which would be fatal to the child's life. Then mother and child are bathed by the *dai* in warm water. The body of the child is smeared with *ghi* or butter to keep its skin smooth and warm. A bedstead is placed somewhere in a dark corner of the house or veranda. There the mother has to remain for the next few days. The baby is beside her and covered with the same blanket. Later the child is placed in a hammock prepared of old rags and suspended from the ceiling of the house. A mat or curtain is often used to conceal mother and child from the eyes of the people and to keep away the fresh air which, since it also allows entrance to all kinds of evil spirits which might harm the child, is considered to be particularly harmful to mother and child.

It is no wonder that the mortality of women in child-birth is high. This is due, first, to the environment: The Balahis live generally in unhealthy quarters and dirty surroundings which are veritable hot-beds of infection and bacilli. Then, most of the Balahis have no house fit for a delivery; and even if the house is a good one, the necessary cleanliness is often lacking. The place of confinement, moreover, is not in the best part of the house, but in a dark, small, dirty corner of the house or veranda, without light and ventilation. Other causes which raise the mortality rate of maternity cases are the bad physical conditions of the Balahi mothers: Often they are infected with venereal diseases, their constitution is weakened by undernourishment and frequent sickness, in particular by ever recurrent attacks of malaria. Pregnant women have usually to work in house and field till the very day of confinement and since they begin very early in life to bear children and one pregnancy quickly follows another, the organism of the mother is quickly exhausted.

Then, the standard of living of the Balahis is generally so low that, except for a short time just after delivery, they can rarely afford a pregnant mother better nourishment. In the face of the utter lack of cleanliness and expert nursing by a trained mid-wife, the dangerous and harmful superstitious practices and the other wrongful manipulations of the attendant women, we can only wonder that so many Balahi women survive child-birth.

After all is over, the *dai* herself takes a bath and changes her clothes. Then she goes home telling everybody she meets on the way of the happy event. She may come back the next day and the five following days to look after mother and child and to nurse them if necessary. Mother and child are kept as much apart as possible from other people, even from their own family. It takes several days before even the father of the child is permitted to look at his own child!

The mid-wife is paid for her services a fee of two rupees for a boy, and one rupee and a quarter for a girl. Sometimes the dirty clothes which the mother wore in child-birth are given to the *dai*.

As soon as the news of the happy arrival has spread, the men of the Balahi quarters come together. If the father of the new-born baby is fairly wealthy and generous, a band will play a serenade, or at least the *sing* will be blown vigorously. The other men may sing till the child's father appears and invites them to some entertainment. Then all sit down and chew tobacco or smoke a pipe. The father of the child must pay a few rupees to the assembled community. He gives less if he is poor or if the new-born child is a girl. This gift is called *bhata* and is usually turned into liquor for the men or *gur* for the children. Besides this gift the musicians each get an anna for their performance.

After the men have gone away, the women and girls appear to present their congratulations. They sing and dance for about an hour till they too are entertained with *gur* and sugar. Each of the women may also get a pound of *joari* and a few paisa. When the women have gone the men come together once more to drink the liquor. They may also approach a Brahman and inquire of him the future of the child. The Brahman casts the horoscope and presents the child with a name if such is required of him. However, nowadays the Balahis often dispense with the services of a Brahman, perhaps, to save the fee which the Brahman demands. It amounts to four annas only. Of late, also, the Balahis seem to have lost faith in these forecasts of the future which are so seldom happy for the Balahi child.

Nowadays it is customary for the father himself to assign a name to his child. He never ventures to give the child his own name, or the name of its mother (in case the baby is a girl). For it is believed that a parent would die soon if a child is given the name of its father or mother, or indeed of any other relative. To Balahis the personal name has a deep significance: It expresses one's self, a reality. It is something substantial which has a subtle, but real, relation to the inner life-spirit of a person, to his personality.

This is probably also the reason why the Balahis are often reluctant to call each other by the personal name. Apart from modesty which allows no man to call his wife by her name, and vice versa, the Balahis generally substitute a more general designation for the real personal name when they address somebody. Relatives are usually addressed by terms which signify the relationship. Even strangers may be called 'brother' or 'father' or 'son', a woman may be addressed as 'sister' or 'mother' or 'daughter', while better acquainted people are also called 'uncle' or 'aunt'. Sometimes a

man is called after the name of his native village, or after his profession, or after some peculiar personal characteristic, for instance 'the lame one', or 'the one-eyed', etc. The personal name is rarely mentioned. Fear of evil spirits is also a reason why a person, in particular a child, is never called by his real name after sunset. No mother will call her child by his name during the night, for fear lest evil spirits overhear her and harm the child.

Sometimes even the proper designation of a near relationship is changed to a more remote one: A son often calls his father 'uncle', or a daughter calls her mother 'sister' or 'woman', and vice versa with the corresponding appellations. But this custom may be due to the fact that children hear their parents being addressed in these more general terms by other people. They just imitate them.

Frequently a boy or girl gets a second name and this will be the one by which they are called, while their real name is not even known in public. A man frequently changes the name of his second wife and calls her by his first wife's name, indicating that she is as dear to him as his first wife.

Balahi boys usually receive as their name an epithet of Krishna, not the name 'Krishna' itself, but the name of Krishna's relatives or friends, or the name of Rama or one of his followers. Balahi girls are often called after goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. It is also a common practice to name children after the weekday on which they were born, as Sonya (Monday), Manglya (Tuesday), Budya (Wednesday), etc. Often quite beautiful names are given to a child, as Kesar (Saffron), Kastori (Musk), Gulbi (Rose), but also names of such bad significance as Mailya (the dirty one), Burya (the bad one), Maru (dirt). Such offensive names are given to deceive malignant spirits who are supposed to take less notice of children called by such disreputable names.

Almost all the names which the Balahis select for their children are common among the higher castes of the district. Such Balahi names, as Tolu, Dalu, and others, are however still in use and in the Nimar are peculiar to the caste.

When the ceremony of name-giving is over, the men go to a liquor-shop where the father of the new-born baby must entertain the whole party. All this takes place on the day of the child's birth, or, if the birth has occurred late in the evening, on the following morning.

The mother does not take any food on two or three days following her delivery. She is, however, permitted to take a kind of tea which is called *khaira pani* (bitter water). After three days she receives her first meal, a gruel made of *sauria* (a small grain), *gur* and *ghi*. Only after the fifth day does the mother begin to take

her ordinary meals. The child is not put to breast for the first three days, but its lips are sometimes moistened with cow's milk. The Balahis believe that the mother's milk will not flow or that it is obnoxious to the child's health in the first three days after delivery. Possibly, this custom has a deeper significance, because new-born cow and buffalo calves too are not allowed to drink milk for the first three days of their life.

## (2) The Sixth Day after Birth: The Day of Chatti Mata

On the fifth day after birth the mid-wife sweeps the house and gives it a coating with fresh cow-dung. She washes all the clothes touched by mother and child, and even the bed-stead on which the mother has lain.

In the evening all the women of the Balahi community meet at the house of birth. Now the feast of Chatti Mata, also called Bimata,

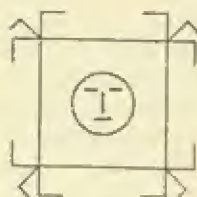


Fig. 1. Picture of Chatti Mata.

is celebrated. Chatti Mata is the goddess of child-birth. She is supposed to write the child's fate on his forehead during the coming night. The picture of Chatti Mata is painted, with cow-dung, in a *chaulk* (a magic square) on the wall over the mother's bed. Sometimes five lines are drawn in the *chaulk* with *sendhur* (vermilion) instead of the face. Then a woman brings about a pound of *joari* (millet) flour, and pours it on the ground just under the *chaulk*. She hides a *kalya* fruit (of the Bhilawan tree — *Semecarpus anacardium*) and a copper coin in the pile. Sometimes five piles of *sendhur* and five balls of cowdung are placed at the side of the pile of *joari* flour. Now the woman who has drawn the *chaulk* upon the wall, offers *kuku* (a sacred red powder) and rice before the image of Chatti Mata and ties a red thread (*kora sūl*) around the child's neck. Then she fetches a small brass plate (*thali* or *arti*) on which are a *diya* (earthen oil lamp), two balls of *ghat* (or *ghungri*, wheat and gram boiled together) and two balls of wet ashes from the hearth-fire. The

mother then takes the child in her arms and leaves the house, accompanied by all the women. On the *angan*, the elevated place before the door, a woman draws another *chauk* with *joari* flour, about six inches square. Five small stones and a copper coin are put on the *chauk*, the stones signify the five days since the birth of the child. The mother, with the child on her arms, steps on the *chauk*, and the mid-wife throws the four balls of *ghat* and ashes over the mother's shoulders backwards. The two balls made of ashes signify that the hearth-fire should never be extinguished, and the two balls of *ghat* that there should always be enough food in the house.

Now the women begin to sing a hymn in honour of Chatti Mata. Singing they approach the door of the house where they place a burning dung-cake. The mother raises one foot and holds it over the fire. This ceremony is meant to express the wish that there should always be a warming fire in the house. Then the mother attempts to enter her house but the other women hold her back and force her to tell them the name of her husband. After much teasing she pronounces the name and is allowed to enter.

Now all the women taking part in the feast are fed with *joari* bread, rice and *dal*. After the meal the women sit down for a merry chat, they sing and dance in honour of the Chatti Mata, so that the goddess may be pleased and grant her favours to the child.

This ceremony is also a purification of the mother and her child. The purification is necessary, the Balahis maintain, because the mother had become unclean at the time of delivery. And the child has to be purified because in a former birth it might have been of a lower caste.

Late at night, when the women have departed and the guests have gone to rest, the *dai* comes once more and makes a small pot from the *ghat*. She fills it with oil and lights a wick. The *diya* is placed upon the stone on which the mother is accustomed to squat when she bathes. Under the stone the mid-wife hides the five stones which were placed on the *chauk* before the door. Then she calls the mother to bring her child. Both are washed by the *dai*. As her fee for this service the *dai* gets a few annas and sometimes also the old clothes of the mother.

(3) The Eleventh Day after the Child's Birth:  
jalwai puja<sup>41</sup>).

On the eleventh day Chatti Mata is believed to depart from the house and the occasion is celebrated by a sacrifice. In the past days

<sup>41</sup>) *Jalwai* is the term used for the unveiling of the bride in her bridal array before the bridegroom; here the baby is shown to all for the first time.

the parents of the happy mother and other relatives have been informed of the event. Usually the *nai* is sent to invite the guests. Or the invitation is conveyed through casual travellers who pass through the village or meet in the bazaar. If a special messenger is sent, he must take sweets (*puri*) to the house of the parents-in-law. He says: "Your daughter has had a baby. Therefore the child's father sends you *puri*. What is your intention? Are you coming?" The parents make the usual inquiries about the health of the mother and child and then decide whether they will come for the *jaiwai* ceremony. If they are poor and fear the expenses, they make an excuse that implies that they are not coming. The *nai* gets a rupee for his message or an equivalent present in kind. Poor families give less.

It often happens that the young woman when she feels the time of delivery approaching asks to be brought to her parents' house. In this case it is the parents of her husband who are invited to the *jaiwai puja*. The parents of the child's mother present some gifts to the son-in-law: a turban, or a loin-cloth, often also a shirt; to their daughter a skirt, a blouse, or a *lugra* (main upper garment). If they are well-to-do, they may invite other relatives and even the whole village community for the feast which is also called *barsa*.

The feast begins with a meal. After the meal mother and child are dressed up in new clothes, and the following ceremony takes place: A *chawk* is drawn before the door of the house. On this *chawk* a *lota* (pearshaped small brass-pot) is placed. A copper coin is thrown into the *lota*. Then a yoke, or the beam of a weaving loom, is placed on the ground before the *chawk*. The parents of the newborn child are directed to take their places on the yoke. The mother carries her child in her arms, almost smothered under heavy clothes. Before them is set a brass plate (*arti*) with rice, *kuku*, a *diya*, and two balls made of ashes and two balls of *ghat*. The wick of the *diya* is lit. Now four girls approach and each puts *kuku* (red paint) first on the father's, then on the mother's, and lastly on the child's forehead. The mid-wife (or another woman) throws the four balls over the mother's shoulder. The child's maternal grand-father pays a fee of two annas to the girls and the woman. Then a sheet is spread over the head and the shoulders of the child's father, a copper coin is tied in a corner of the sheet. His wife's scarf is joined to the man's cloth. After a while the *nai* opens the knot and takes the coin as his fee.

This ceremony resembles a certain rite in the wedding ritual and is indeed considered as a renewal of the same. Among the Balahis a marriage is really completed only when blessed with a child. Before this a marriage is often dissolved and man and wife are

regarded as no more than just boy and girl. But after the birth of a child they are really man and wife.

After this ceremony has taken place the young mother is again brought before the image of the Chatti mata, carrying her child in her arms. The women who accompany her begin to sing: *Chal Dewi mata wo — man ke manora — pura kiya — mari Dewi wo!* (Go now, divine mother! the heart's work has been fulfilled, my goddess!) — In plain words: "Depart now, goddess, what had to be done, has been done!"

The women sing these words repeating them again and again. After this song they sing other songs and also dance till late in the night.

After all the guests have departed or are gone to rest, the *dai* comes once more as on the sixth day after birth and bathes mother and child.

#### (4) The 21st Day after Birth

From the day of delivery till the 21st day, or sometimes even for as long as five weeks, the baby's mother may not be left alone. Her hair is smeared with *kuku*, the sacred red powder. She may not leave the house for fear evil spirits may hurt her or her child. But when she must leave the house for a call of nature somebody of the family, usually a child, must accompany her. For the first five days the young mother, when she goes out, carries a sickle on her head; after these five days she carries the sickle on her shoulder. When she returns, the sickle is placed on her bed under the blanket. Iron is supposed to ward off sickness and the sharp edge of the sickle is believed to frighten away the evil spirits.

During this time of lying-in the young mother is regarded as unclean and therefore is not allowed to cook or to fetch water from the well. Her husband too must keep away from her and is not permitted to sleep with her. If possible the woman is given richer meals at this time, bread prepared with *ghi*, wheat bread or a dish of rice instead of the heavy and undigestible *joari* bread.

In poor families, however, the number of days of rest for the mother after her confinement are often considerably curtailed. Sometimes the rites of purification are performed already after a fortnight, in order to enable the woman to take over her household duties or to work in the fields. But even if the mother is obliged to leave the house for a while, her baby is never brought into the open air, in particular not when the sky is cloudy. The Balahis are convinced that the sultriness caused by cloudy weather is especially harmful to the child's health. Nor do the Balahis like people to look at a new-born child, for fear of the evil eye. Even the father of the child

is not allowed to see his offspring for the first five days. Some women are supposed to have the evil eye, and those with piercing looks are suspected as witches and carefully prevented from seeing the child. Even when the baby is already a few years old, the mother will try to keep it out of sight of such a woman who, in fact, may be quite harmless and good-natured. Balahi mothers, in general, do not like it if one admires their children's beauty or strength, they fear that such compliments will draw on the child the attention of evil spirits. A mother whose child has been praised may complain: "This woman has eaten my child! (*Yeh aurat mere bachche ko khayi*)" <sup>42</sup>). Balahi mothers believe that such words of admiration and praise are often inspired by jealousy and envy, sentiments which in themselves are apt to harm a child and make it sicken and waste away. "An evil wish is like a poisonous arrow which pierces the tender heart of a child."

On the 21st or 31st day after the delivery, and sometimes, as we have seen, even after a fortnight only, mother and child undergo their last purification. Now and then this ceremony is already combined with the *jahwai* ceremony. The mother, accompanied by the other women of the family, steps before the door of the house, a sickle on her shoulder. She scatters *joari* grains in all directions. Then she lifts two earthen or brass water pots on her head and takes a *lota* in her hand. The women then lead her to a well or stream. There the woman bathes and changes her clothes which she also washes. The other women help her. Then she fills the two water vessels and the *lota* which she brought with water and carries them home. Arriving at the house she puts the vessels down at their customary place. Then she touches all the pots in the house, saying: "*Bhariya, bhariya!*" This is a blessing and means: May this pot always be full! Or she says: "*Bhariya rita*" (May this empty pot be filled!) This rite expresses the conviction that the woman is clean now from her pollution and may touch anything in the house. After that the woman takes her child and carries it outside on the veranda of the house. There she gently lays it down on the ground, upon a sheet on which has been laid the stone used for grinding spices. The sheet is now wrapped round the baby and the stone. The mother and the mid-wife squat down at either side and between them roll it five or seven times to and fro. Then the mother is directed by the *dayan* to unwrap the child and to carry it into the house. But her husband's sister or another woman prevents her from entering until she has told them the name of her husband. It usually takes a lot of teasing and coaxing till the woman whispers

<sup>42</sup>) In correct Hindi one would say: *Is aurat ne mere bachche ko khaya*.

the name of her husband. After that she is allowed to enter, and ordered to sweep the house and to give the walls and the floor a coating with cow-dung. Finally she has to light the hearth-fire and to cook the meal for the whole family. At last she is free to perform her customary household duties.

## Chapter XI

### Childhood Days

#### (1) Infant Nursing

The mother nurses her child for about three years or until the next child arrives. For the first nine months the mother's milk is almost the only food which a child receives. Then gradually, the child is given other fare besides its mother's milk. Small children are given rice water and, if it is available, cow's or goat's milk. But the latter is usually beyond the means of the average Balahi family. No wonder therefore that few children get proper nourishment, for they are not yet able to eat the heavy *joari* bread, and the rice water they get instead is of little nutritive value. Also the milk of the mother is after the first few months not much better. Moreover, the mother herself is often undernourished or malaria-ridden and is unable to nourish her child properly. A child whose mother dies soon after the birth or whose mother is unable to nourish him is fed entirely on cow's or goat's milk, or on rice water mixed with sugar or *gur*. No Balahi woman will ever act as a wet-nurse.

A Balahi mother suckles her child whenever it begins to cry. There is no regular time of feeding. To wean a child the mother rubs the nipples of her breasts with tamarind (*imli*) juice which tastes bitter. But this she does only if another baby is on the way. Otherwise the child may suck as long as it likes. Especially the youngest child who is often the pet of the mother is treated by her with great indulgence. Cases are known of 14 years old boys who still sleep with their mother on the same bed and take her breast.

A baby is kept away from the fresh air as much as possible. In fact it is not taken outside at all. Cleanliness and hygiene are unknown among the Balahis and children frequently suffer from sore eyes or a painful inflammation of the ears, frequent consequences of uncleanness and neglect. But when a child gets open wounds and worms appear in these wounds — no rare thing in the rainy season — the child and all who touch it become unclean and are outcasted. Before the family may again associate with caste members, the child must be cured, a dinner must be given to the village community, and a heavy fine is exacted. This punishment would seem

to be a good enough means to encourage cleanliness and hygiene, but these motives can hardly be said to inspire the formulation of this caste rule.

Clean clothes for the baby are not considered very necessary. Since the Balahi women do not know the use of soap, their washing of soiled clothes is not very successful. But they usually don't bother about it. Nor have small children much to complain of in the matter of overdressing. In the first months of their life they generally have no clothes at all, small babies are simply wrapped in some rags to keep them warm. As soon as they are able to crawl about, they get a shirt or jacket which reaches only down to the waist to prevent it from getting soiled. The lower part of the body is kept bare. This is the only dress of Balahi children till their fourth or fifth year. Then only, sometimes even later, boys get their first loin-cloth and girls their first skirt.

The Balahis like children, and the more they have the more pleased they are. A large family is considered a great blessing of the gods and a reward for a good life. The Balahis view with the strongest disapproval the principles of birth-control. They say: "When the gods give children, they provide also the milk to feed them". If a marriage remains without children or if they all die soon, the peace of the family is in danger and, if he has got money enough to pay the required bride-price, the husband soon begins to look around for a second wife. If his wife gives birth only to girls, then too will he marry a second wife, in order to beget a son. For the Balahis believe that it is always the woman's fault if she bears no children. As long as the man is able to perform the conjugal act, he does not admit that he may be the sterile party. I happen to know a Balahi whose first marriage remained childless. He took a second wife, but when she too bore him no children he began to ill-treat her and to beat her because of her presumed sterility. When it was suggested that probably something was wrong with the man, since he had never had any children of his own, while his second wife, a widow, had born children to her first husband, no Balahi would admit the possibility of such a thing. They all blamed the woman and pitied the poor man who had been so unlucky to marry two sterile women one after another.

The Balahis like children, especially sons. For sons are the hope of old age. The old Indian proverb: "A son's a son till he gets himself a wife, but a daughter is a daughter all her life", does not apply to the Balahis. For them the daughters bring sorrow into the house. When they die young, the parents naturally feel sad. If they survive, they soon leave the family and go to their husband's home. Daughters belong to the family only till they get married.

But sons remain in the family, even after they are married. Parents therefore must rely on their sons for their support when they cannot any longer work. And indeed, a family generally fares well if there are many sons in the house: they work together and increase the wealth of the family, and even their wives help to this end; while daughters are fed, taught, and clothed to become one day a stranger's property.

Nevertheless, after the birth of a son, girls also are welcome in a Balahi family. A mother, in particular, wants a daughter to help her later in her household-duties and in caring for the babies.

## (2) Parents and Children

### a) Location of Responsibility for Child Care

Father and mother both take care of the children, but at all ages it is the mother who naturally devotes most of her time to their care. However, when the mother is sick or has died, her husband performs all the necessary, even the most intimate, duties if there is no other woman in the house. In case of sickness both parents nurse the child, but the mother is supposed to do the larger part.

The Balahis do not bother much about the training and education of their children. When the latter are still very young, they cause their mother a certain amount of trouble and worry, but as soon as they can crawl they are left to themselves or to the care and supervision of elder children. In particular the bigger girls must take care of the babies when the parents go to work, and even quite small girls can be seen walking about carrying a baby nearly as big as themselves on the hip. If a mother has a small baby and there is no one to look after it, she takes it with her to the place of work where in the shade of a tree she puts it on the ground, well wrapped up, going from time to time to have a look at it and to feed it.

There is no cruelty towards children, and no infanticide except in the case of deformed children. Step-children are however often ill-treated or more often neglected. This is the reason why a widower who remarries often gives the children of his first marriage to his own relatives. Such children especially if they are halfgrown are readily adopted because they can make themselves useful. In rare cases when a mother wants to be rid of a baby in order to marry again, or to punish her husband after a quarrel, she may kill her baby. But usually she does not use violence, but either poisons it or just ceases to feed the child. But the child of an unmarried mother is often killed unless somebody is ready to adopt it, for such a woman can only be re-admitted into the caste after the child has been disposed of.

### b) Discipline and Authority

Among the Balahis there are no strict rules of obedience and discipline for the children in their relation to their parents. Parents rarely strike their children for punishment though they may occasionally beat them in anger. A small child is not punished when it lifts its hand against a parent and, though such cases are rare and strongly rebuked by others, even grown-up sons have been known to beat their parents. In one such case known to me the father turned his son out of his house after he had been beaten.

Generally, however, the power of the parents over their children is informal and gradually diminishes as the children grow. Though in theory the authority of the father remains supreme as long as the children stay in the house, few fathers are able to assert themselves when the sons are fully grown up. Then the time has come for the eldest son to take charge of the family property and the old father is advised in a friendly way that in the future he should leave everything to his sons and live in peace and leisure for the rest of his life.

It is rare that a parent punishes a child even if it is very rude. Indeed a parent would consider deliberate punishment of a child in cold blood repulsive. In the heat of the moment a Balahi may strike a child who is mischievous or has done something wrong. But as a rule the Balahis do little more than scowl at a wrong-doer for they fear that by more severe punishment they might lose the affection of their children and incur their revenge when they are grown up. At Sirpur there lived a boy who became very unruly and began to steal when he was about eight years old. But his father treated him with indulgence and scarcely ever punished him. Once the boy happened to enter a Mehtar's house and broke open a box where the latter kept his money. When the theft became known and the thief was detected, the family of the boy was outcasted by the village *panch*, because the sweeper had also kept his bread in the same box. Though the whole family of the boy was involved in serious trouble by the boy's act, he was hardly scolded and his father excused him by saying that the boy was still very young and had not understood what he was doing.

One would expect that, treated with so much indulgence and leniency, Balahi children would become spoiled and ill-bred. But this is not so. Children though lazy and much too playful are generally affectionate and kind-hearted.

It appears that life in general and the influence of public opinion are the most effective disciplinary controls. The Balahis, kept in strict subjection and dependence by the higher castes, have little opportunity of developing a spirit of boisterous independence or

rebellion against the forces of usage and convention. Any attempt to assert themselves against their own caste fellows or against the high castes is easily quelled by social and economic pressure. A man whose livelihood depends so much upon the goodwill of his social superiors and the cooperation of his caste-fellows, cannot well afford to revolt against them and thus risk social and economic ostracism. Therefore, even if parents have failed to teach them discipline in childhood the Balahis soon learn how to behave in adolescence and manhood.

### c) The Emotional Relationship between Elders and Children

Parents have generally great affection for their children though they are usually not very demonstrative. Balahis are seldom seen hugging or kissing a child. At the most they lay cheek to cheek or caress a child by gently stroking its head.

In a family boys are always more welcome than girls, but it is difficult to say whether affection is greater between parent and child of the same or the opposite sex. At an early age boys generally seem to prefer the company of their father and elder brothers, while girls keep with the mother. However, the youngest child in the family be it boy or girl usually receives preferential care not only from the parents but also from the elder brothers and sisters. Widows particularly often display an exaggerated affection for their youngest child, and frequently refuse to remarry because a new union generally implies a separation from their pet son or daughter. It is true that sometimes mothers give up their children on remarriage without any show of sorrow or regret at the moment of parting, or that sometimes a woman elopes with a lover and light-heartedly abandons husband and children, but such cases are exceptions. It happens more often that a poor widow works herself almost to death to feed and clothe her children properly. But always it is the youngest child which receives the greatest affection and care. In a village near Pandhana a certain boy of twelve years is never seen without his mother, he is with her day and night and still takes her breast. In another village a widowed woman with grown-up sons and daughters pets her youngest girl and spoils her by granting her every wish and whim. The girl, in turn, clings to her mother with greatest affection and never for a moment allows her to leave her side. Another woman with grown-up sons shows exceptional affection for her youngest boy and although the woman is otherwise fierce and ill-tempered she lavishes all her love on the boy who is a soft-hearted, sweet child. Though now more than five years of age, he still takes his mother's breast. He is delicate and still wets his bed.

## d) The Children's Role in the Daily Round of Work

From an early age children and adolescents begin without much responsibility and compulsion to assist in the work of their elders, resting and playing whenever they feel inclined to it. In very poor families, naturally, children begin to work in earnest much earlier. The small boys are usually employed in grazing the cattle and goats on the pasture while girls help the mother in her work. In the rainy season and at harvest time both boys and girls are employed in field-work. Since most of the Balahis have no fields of their own, they as well as their children work as menials of the land-owners, but children get much lower wages. This means much hardship for the Balahi children who though preferring to play must work almost as hard as their elders for half the wages.

Girls are as a rule more industrious than boys. For them there is always work and employment, if not in the field, at least in the household. Quite small girls follow their mother to the well, balancing a small pot on their head, or they lend a hand in the cooking. Nevertheless elder women are often heard complaining that their sons' wives are ignorant of the simplest household tasks, and they accuse the girls' mothers of having spoiled them. Though such complaints are often exaggerated, some girls really preferred to remain idle while their mothers worked, and now they have to learn in a harsher school, in the house of a severe mother-in-law.

## (3) Adoption and Foster-Parenthood

Small children are readily transferred to the home of kinsmen when for certain reasons the natural parents cannot or will not take care of them; but they are seldom adopted by strangers, nor do caste rules permit a Balahi child to be handed over to members of an other caste. Widows who remarry and women who are divorced must surrender their children, except a baby at the breast, and such children are adopted by the father's nearest relatives. A widower too is often obliged to give up his small children, either because he cannot take adequate care of them or because the step-mother neglects or ill-treats them. These children are welcomed by relatives, generally of the same *kutumb* (relationship) whose marriage has remained childless.

The adopted father gains all the rights of a natural father which the latter automatically loses. This is so however only in theory, in practice a father often demands his children back after they have been a few years with their foster-parents.

#### (4) Formal Education

Among the Balahis there is no formal education — there is no such institution as a school. Balahi children learn the customs of their caste and the practice of their trade or profession from their elders by routine and imitation, through observation and informal conduct.

There is no initiation ceremony, either for boys or for girls. The children learn their father's way of earning his livelihood or their mother's tasks in household and field first by playful imitation, all too soon by necessity. Clumsiness and lack of skill are rarely punished and seldom criticised, laziness and indolence are regarded with great leniency. Children are never put to a task too difficult for them, unless from necessity. If then they fail to accomplish their task, they are not scolded or punished. The Balahis show patience and indulgence to a failing child and so preserve the child's self-respect and self-confidence.

Adolescent girls often have to take upon themselves the duties of the household in times of sickness or after the death of the mother. And half-grown boys often try bravely to replace the father at the plough or at the loom. Their accomplishments are readily acknowledged while their failings, far from being criticised, are accepted as natural. Plenty of encouragement is given to any kind of helpful activity while no harsh criticism discourages a doubtful or clumsy beginning. This holds good, of course, only for such undertakings as are kept within the bounds of tradition and custom, for the Balahis are still strongly averse to any innovations.

As a rule, the Balahis have little use for school education. As farmers, farm servants, or weavers, they are able to follow their traditional profession, nowadays as before, without much book-learning which, in their own opinion, only makes people discontented and rebellious to the established order of things. The Balahis, in fact, stand economically and socially on such a low level that the ordinary school education is not very helpful to them. School education does not help them to improve their material and social position, it only creates new needs. This makes their life worse because in the near future there is for them little chance of satisfying these newly created needs. It is really a vicious circle: without education they have no prospects for advance and uplift, but without an improvement of their social and economic conditions mere book learning is of no use to them. The complexity of this problem (which affects not only the Balahis, but a large part of the rural population of India) has long since baffled the ingenuity of social reformers. Perhaps only a radical change from primitive agriculture to modern industrialisation can bring about a satisfactory solution.

While the great majority of Balahis regard school education as something superfluous, a few Balahis have been eager to give their children the chance of an education and this applies especially to the Kotwars (government employed village watchmen), Balahi Sadhus and Bhats. Indeed the latter must know how to read if they want to fulfil their traditional vocation as the spiritual leaders, or the registrars of their caste. It is these exceptions which prove that the Balahis would send their children to school if they were convinced of the practical advantage of school education.

Another reason for illiteracy among the Balahis is, besides the scarcity of schools in the villages; the fact that wherever schools do exist Balahi children are often discouraged from attending. Though theoretically government has abolished untouchability in schools, Balahi children (like other low-caste children) must still sit apart from the other children, generally tucked away in a back corner, and often neglected by the teachers. No wonder, therefore, that their results are not much satisfactory. Under these circumstances it requires exceptional ability and endurance for a Balahi pupil to obtain the same marks as the privileged children of the higher castes.

According to the Census of India 1931<sup>43)</sup> only 316 of the 24,025 Balahis were, at the age of seven and over, literate in Hindi and among these were two females. Thus the percentage of literacy is only 1.3. Of the 1,490 Christian Balahis in the Nimar District C.P. 47 (2.4 per cent) were literate (42 males and 5 females). Three Balahi males could read and write English<sup>44)</sup>.

In the year 1931 conditions in the adjoining Holkar State were still worse: of the 98,251 Balahis of the State only 672 (662 males and 10 females) were literate in Hindi, and ten males in English (that is 0.69 per cent!)<sup>45)</sup>. But in Holkar State too the Christian Balahis are better educated than their Hindu caste fellows: of 248 Christians 11 (4.4 per cent) could read and write in Hindi. Ten years later there was a marked improvement in Balahi literacy: In 1941 there were 1538 literates (1494 males and 44 females) in Hindi and 3 males in English among the Balahis, that is 1.8 per cent! Besides these, there were on record 372 partially literate Balahis (that is: persons who could read but not write)<sup>46)</sup>.

<sup>43)</sup> Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part II, p. 330.

<sup>44)</sup> The percentage of literate Christian Balahis is probably even higher than that recorded by the Census, since many Christian Balahis were returned as Indian Christians.

<sup>45)</sup> Census of Central India, vol. XVI: Holkar State, part II, p. 144, Bombay 1933.

<sup>46)</sup> Census of Central India 1941, in print.

## (5) Children's Games

Balahi children are very playful. As long as they are too small for useful work, or at times of leisure, they play all day and often late into the night. But they have few organised games.

Small children usually remain at home, and are always under the supervision of their elders. If there are sisters and brothers in the house, they play among themselves, only occasionally joined by other children of the neighbourhood. Small children just jump or run about, chasing or teasing each other. They are often very active and noisy, though they seldom come to blows. As soon as the children begin to dress with discrimination (at the age of five or six), boys and girls begin also to play separately. The boys join the bigger boys of their neighbourhood and, later, of the village, while the girls remain more attached to the house and play with their younger sisters and brothers, or with a few girl friends of the neighbourhood. For girls the serious side of life begins much earlier and the playful years of childhood soon pass.

Conspicuous is the absence of toys in playing. Constructive games are remarkably rare among Balahi children. Imitation bullock-carts and agricultural implements are sometimes manufactured by Balahi boys out of bamboo sticks and the pith of certain soft woods, and often such toys are made for them by a father or elder brother. Doll-like figures are occasionally made out of rags, but when the game is over, they are dismantled or thrown away. The mother-instinct in girls is satisfied not by playing with toys and dolls but with younger brothers and sisters. Fiction-play is popular among small Balahi children. They dramatize human life, often very realistically: they play 'father and mother', imitating even the sexual actions of their parents, or the more impressive events in family life, as giving birth to a baby, a wedding, a quarrel between father and mother, work in the house and in the fields.

When the boys leave the society of the girls of their home, they begin to join in the village games. Balahi boys have no games peculiar to their caste, but enjoy the same recreations as the high-caste boys, but play their own games. Their play-ground is the village, or more often the jungle and the village waste-land where they graze the cattle.

At the beginning of the rainy season the boys play with tops. Some boys buy a spinning top ready-made in the bazaar, others make one for themselves. The top is twirled with a long string the end of which is held between the middle and ring-finger of the right hand, while the top itself is held between the thumb and index-finger.

In this position the top is thrown forcefully on the ground while the end of the string is held fast between the middle and ring-finger. The top is thus brought spinning to the ground. Then another boy spins his top, throwing it in such a way that it may unseat the first already spinning on the ground. He is the winner who, after unseating the other boy's top, can lift his top, still spinning, from the ground on the palm of his hand<sup>47)</sup>

During July and August, at the climax of the monsoon, boys make stilts of bamboo poles on which they walk about the village. The stilts are called *geti* or *kharau* (in Nimari). They are thrown away on Pola (the cattle feast) at the boundaries of the village<sup>48)</sup>.

During the hot season and at the beginning of the rains marbles is a favourite game.

Balahi boys also enjoy a game of *gilli danda*, played with a stick (*danda*) and a short billet of wood (*gilli*) which is pointed at either end. The billet is laid on the ground and the player makes it jump by hitting at the pointed end. When it is in the air he strikes it again and tries to hit it as far as possible. The other players try to catch the *gilli* as it comes down; whoever catches it becomes the striker.

Village boys are very fond of playing football, if only they can get hold of a ball. Even a discarded tennis ball will do. This kind of foot-ball is conspicuous for its lack of rules, anything except perhaps throwing the ball by hand is permitted to secure a goal.

Though hockey is the national game of India, it is not played much in the villages of the Nimar. Proper hockey-sticks are unobtainable and too expensive.

About the time of Holi, Balahi children as also the children of other castes play what they call *kokohandi* ('Touch last'). The rules of this game are as follows: The players form two parties, and there is the chaser. The boys of one party sit down in a long row, one behind the other at a distance of about two yards. The boys of the second party must move along the line of sitting boys pursued by the chaser. They are safe as long as they are touching

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<sup>47)</sup> Some years ago I heard a Korku folk-song in which the droning sound of the spinning top was likened to the rolling thunder of an on-coming rain-storm. It is probable that the game of the spinning top had formerly the significance of a rain-calling magic. But the Balahis have no such explanation for the game.

<sup>48)</sup> The aboriginal Korkus and Gonds of the District say that boys walk on stilts during the monsoon that the crops may grow as high as the stilts.

the head or shoulder of a sitting boy, they can only be caught while running from one sitting boy to the other or when they have been enticed away from the line. A boy who is caught changes his place with that of the chaser. After a while, the two parties exchange places and the boys who so long have been sitting in a row begin to run pursued by a chaser.

### *Lonpat or Atipati*

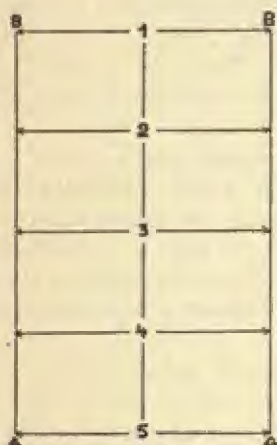


Fig. 2. Lonpat.

During the cool moon-lit nights of the hot season Balahi children play *lonpat* or *atipati* in which the grown-up people also occasionally join. Boys and girls play of course in separate groups. This game is so popular that the children play it every night till long after mid-night, indeed as long as the moon is bright enough to see each other. On a well-levelled open place three long parallel lines are marked on the ground with ashes. Across these lines five cross-lines are drawn (see illustration). Five players are posted on these cross-lines. While the players on the four last lines are not allowed to leave their lines, the player on the first line may also use the long middle side-line and all the other cross-lines.

The attackers have to run from point A to point B in recognised order and back, without being caught by the five guards on the cross-lines. The attackers are safe on their long-side run between the cross-lines, as the guards are not allowed to leave their line. The runners usually attack in two groups on both sides. While the attention of a guard is drawn to one side, the attackers try to slip through at the other side. As long as there are many attackers, it is easy to slip through and also to return unscathed. But when many runners have already been caught and are out of the play, it is extremely difficult to run the blockade of the guards. Having successfully crossed the five cross-lines without being caught, the runners take up a handful of dust (representing salt on account of which the game is called *lonpat*) and return the same way.

This game, obviously, provides excellent entertainment and much fun, and is at the same time a good physical exercise.

*Kokohandi* and *lonpat* are almost the only indigenous social games for which a large number of players is required. The strict

caste rules still prevalent in the villages do not allow people to mix indiscriminately at such games, and it is therefore only in villages with a large Balahi community that such games may be played, as the Balahis are not permitted to join in the games of the caste people.

## Chapter XII

### Marriage

As in other castes and tribes, so also among the Balahis, religion and society play an important part in controlling sex relations. By religious and social sanctions the procreative powers are controlled and sanctioned. Marriage, as the bond which unites man and woman for life, is not so much the private concern of a husband and his wife as of the family, the village community, and the caste. The partners themselves have generally no right of free choice. Often they see each other for the first time a few minutes before the marriage actually takes place. The question of mutual love and affection is obviously not regarded as a necessary prerequisite for a Balahi marriage. From the Balahi point of view the first purpose of marriage is procreation, the perpetuation of the family, the clan, the caste. As such, sex relations fall under the control and jurisdiction of the family and the caste elders. That sex-intercourse also serves as the physical expression of love, and is the climax of mutual affection between the married partners is admitted by the Balahis, but this appears to them a point of minor importance. They claim that the primary supposition for a happy and lasting marriage is the child, not the love and affection between man and woman.

Since every member of the caste has the natural duty to pass on the life-substance to children and children's children, marriage is held indispensable for every Balahi male and female. No Balahi remains unmarried. Even if a Balahi has certain physical defects which make him unfit for conjugal life, he must go through the wedding ritual and attempt a consummation of the marriage. Only then, after the impossibility of married life has become apparent, may the marriage be dissolved. A man or woman living alone is looked down on, for it is believed that there is obviously something wrong with them. Girls never remain unmarried. Widows are expected to marry again unless they have a number of children or are too old for remarriage.

A Balahi marriage, as any other Hindu marriage, comprises three groups of ceremonies which are performed to celebrate (1) the betrothal, (2) the actual marriage contract, and (3) the beginning of conjugal life.

### (1) Preliminary Engagement

Engagements are generally arranged when a Balahi boy is about six to eight years of age, while a girl is usually slightly younger at the time of her betrothal. Sometimes a father begins even earlier to look around for a suitable partner for his offspring, especially if he is an ailing or elderly man. His desire is to see the marriage accomplished before his death, for he is fully aware of the difficulties that orphans experience in getting married. Occasionally there are also other reasons responsible for an early betrothal: A certain Gopal, for instance, got engaged when scarcely six months of age while his 'fiancee' was a baby of three months. The fathers of the two children had met at a liquor shop and, after the consumption of a generous quantity of *daru*, had become great friends. In order to cement the new friendship into a lasting union, they decided each to give the other his child in marriage. The betrothal was, accordingly, celebrated then and there. In spite of the somewhat precipitate procedure of their inebriated parents, the children were married to each other after some years. It subsequently turned out to be quite a successful and happy marriage.

At the time of betrothal the boy and the girl concerned are usually not informed of the intention of their parents, and indeed they are generally scarcely capable of understanding what is going on. The betrothal of a boy or girl is entirely an affair of the parents and romance is not allowed to play any part.

The father of a boy is informed by relatives or friends of a certain girl suitable as a bride for his son. As a rule, the Balahis prefer daughters-in-law from distant villages. Thus they forestall the eventual interference of the girl's family when relations may become strained between husband and wife. If the girl's relatives live in the vicinity, they are inclined to take her part whenever she gets a scolding from her mother-in-law or a beating from her husband. The young woman too will be more obstinate and less submissive, and on the slightest provocation will run back to her father's house if the parents live in the same village. Another, and perhaps even stronger, reason for the custom of going outside the village for a wife is that most of the Balahis of a village belong to the same clan. Thus for the Balahis clan exogamy is in many cases equivalent to village exogamy. This feeling of relationship is still so strong that even caste fellows in the village who are of different clans are in a way looked on as relatives and as such are called *gamu ke bhai* (village brothers).

Frequently the Balahis of a village show a certain preference for a particular village from which to select their daughters-in-law.

This may be because marriages are often arranged on the occasion of a wedding or funeral feast when guests are naturally relatives or friends of the parties concerned. Another reason is that the Balahis realise that a young woman will feel more at home in a village where there are already several companions of her childhood.

A betrothal is always arranged by the male relatives of a boy or girl. Women cannot make such an agreement though their voice often carries weight in making the final choice. Many a clever woman is able to carry her point during the discussions of the men though she remains entirely in the background.

The father (or after his death a near relative, such as elder brother or uncle) of the boy arranges a date with the father or guardian of the girl. Both men are brought into contact with each other through the agency of friends or relatives who know them both, or of semi-professional match-makers, called *manjhorias*. The parties usually meet on a market day or on occasion of a marriage or funeral, without the knowledge of the children concerned. If the parents of the children are not yet acquainted with each other, they are introduced by common friends who also inform each of the other's economical and social status. Often the father of the boy expresses the wish to see the girl who is to marry his son, and the father of the girl will want to see what kind of a boy his prospective son-in-law is. Sometimes the children are called under some pretext before the men, or the parents pay an occasional visit to the village where the boy or girl lives. If both parties gain a favourable impression of each other, already at this first preliminary meeting the date will be fixed for the first betrothal (*chhoti mangni*).

It is obvious that beauty of face and body is of little importance in a match which is arranged by other than the marrying partners concerned. Moreover, the betrothed children are generally too young to allow the parents to form an opinion of their physical attractiveness. Many a young man is disappointed when confronted with the bride his parents have chosen for him. And in the first days of married life many girls are miserable if they discover that their husband is physically unattractive, sometimes repulsive. But for the elders it is enough if the partners are both sound in limb and body. If the question of physical beauty is considered at all, attention is centred upon the complexion. For the Balahis think of beauty much in terms of colour. A pale skin is more important than regular and lovely features. Many girls light of skin but with a plain face or a very ordinary figure are spoken of as beautiful.

When the first betrothal (*chhoti mangni*) is about to take place, the father of the boy invites four to five men of his own village to accompany him to the girl's home. The two parties meet at the

liquor shop of the village, or at any other convenient place. Usually a Balahi barber (*nai*) is invited to serve the liquor. First the boy's father buys a bottle of country liquor (*daru*, distilled of *mahua* flowers) which the *nai* offers first to the most distinguished man of the gathering, then to the others according to their age and rank. The Balahis lay much stress upon the right order of precedence, the *nai* therefore must be careful not to hurt anybody's feelings.

When the leading man of the party, a *jat-patel* or another distinguished Balahi, receives his glass of liquor, all get up. The man then begins to speak in a solemn fashion, holding his glass in his right hand: "Shall we now drink the liquor of the betrothal? Or does any relationship in a forbidding degree exist between the two families? Or is there any other reason which makes this match undesirable or even unlawful?" The father of the boy or the girl replies in the same solemn fashion: "There is no reason why the betrothal should not take place. Let us drink the liquor of the betrothal!"

The laws of exogamy, as the Balahis observe them, demand that a man should marry outside the clan of his father and of his mother. Blood-relationship up to the fifth degree, and affinity to the third degree inclusively, make a marriage unlawful. A widow, moreover, cannot marry a member of the clan of her former husband. The reason is that the woman, by her first marriage, had entered the clan of her first husband. A Balahi, however, is permitted to marry two sisters. Though he may not have both sisters at the same time, he may marry his first wife's younger but not her elder sister after the wife's death or divorce. But it is customary that as long as any relationship, however remote, is remembered on either side, a new marriage relationship is avoided. I well remember how much the Balahis disapproved of the union of a man with the sister of his father's brother-in-law's wife.

If there is any doubt about a possible relationship the *bhat* is consulted. Since the *bhat* enters the name of every new-born child in his clan-register, he is able to state officially if any relationship exists between the parties concerned. But generally there is no need to consult the *bhat*, for the Balahis themselves are experts in determining the remotest degrees of relationship.

If the question of relationship is settled to general satisfaction, the leading man of the party dips his finger into his glass of liquor and, sprinkling a few drops on the ground, says: "Ram, Ram! Let us drink!" Then he empties his glass with a few large gulps, for, as the saying goes among the Balahis, liquor is not for the palate, but for warming the stomach. The man returns the glass to the *nai* who refills it and offers it to the next in rank and authority.

He, and after him the others, drink, but first sprinkling a few drops of liquor on the ground with the words: "Ram, Ram!" This sprinkling of liquor before drinking is diversely interpreted by the Balahis: some say that it is an offering to Rama, or to Bhagwan as incarnated in Rama; others believe that it is really an offering to the Mother-Earth. It is also believed that the liquor is spilled to soothe evil spirits lurking in the air and likely to spoil such an important function as a betrothal. One Balahi gave the following explanation: "As I would remove from a glass of water every grain of dirt or a small insect that may have fallen into the glass before I could drink, so I wish to remove from this affair the least shadow of deceit and dishonesty."

If the boy's father can afford it, a second bottle is ordered after the first has been emptied. Again all drink, according to their rank, but omitting the sprinkling of liquor on the ground. After the bottle has made the round, the *nai* at last gets his share. But he may not drink from the same glass as the other Balahis, for though he belongs to the same caste he is socially of an inferior status. He therefore often brings his own glass; if however he uses the common glass he must clean it before the other Balahis may use it again. Before he drinks, he proposes the health of his host, saying: "*Dada* (a diminutive form of 'father') *Ram, Ram!*" or simply: "*Da, salam!*" This is an expression of good wishes.

After the boy's father has thus entertained his guests, custom demands that the girl's father should also buy at least half the quantity of liquor which the boy's father has paid for. When the last bottle is almost empty, the boy's father takes it, pours a few drops of liquor into the glass and offers it to the girl's father, while he is saying: "I am an honest man. I give you my son. Let there be no quarrel! I offer you the glass. Keep it in mind and do not forget our agreement." The girl's father accepts the glass and drinks. He, then, pours the last drops of the liquor into the glass and offers it to the boy's father with the words: "*Yahiu* (relative)! I also am an honest man! I give you my daughter. She will work well for you. Treat her with indulgence!" The boy's father accepts the glass and empties it. This ceremony is called: *larke larki ka adla badla* (exchange of boy and girl).

With this ceremony the preliminary engagement is concluded and the party breaks up. However, if some men feel that the consumption of liquor has not yet been quite up to the solemnity of the occasion, they stay behind and drink until all their money is spent. The whole ritual is called: *chhoti mangni* or *sagai*.

(2) The Betrothal (*bari mangni*)

About one or two months after the *chhoti mangni* the girl's father sends word to the boy's father: "Come and bring the clothes for my daughter — *bari tivari leke ao!*" The boy's father then fixes the date of the actual betrothal which if the father of the boy has enough cash at hand to buy the necessary gifts for the engagement may take place after a few weeks. The bride must be presented with an *orphni* (scarf, 4 to 5 yards in length), a *ghaghri* (a red petticoat, reaching from waist to ankle), sometimes also a *choli* (bodice). These garments should be accompanied with a traditional gift of sweetmeats and spices, for instance the so-called *khoka* which consists of *batasa* (sweets), *pan*<sup>49)</sup>, *supari* (betel-nut), *katha*<sup>50)</sup>, *kopra* (coconut), *chuna* (lime for tobacco-chewing), *gulal* (bright red powder) and *kuku* (dark red powder for ceremonial paint<sup>51)</sup>).

When the day, fixed for the betrothal, arrives, the boy's father invites some of his friends or relatives to accompany him to the girl's home. The party leaves home at such a time that their arrival at the girl's village falls late in the afternoon. When the arrival of the guests is announced, the father of the girl goes a short way to meet them. Host and guests fold their hands in greeting and say: "Ram! Ram!" Then the host invites the guests to come to his house, where some bedsteads (*khat*) covered with blankets or sheets, have been placed for their convenience. All sit down and begin to chat. After a while the girl's father reminds his guests of the purpose of their visit and invites them to present their gifts.

Two of the party, now, get up and call for the yoke (*joro*) of a bullock cart or for the pole of a weaving handloom (*thur*). The yoke or pole is put on the ground just before the main entrance of the house. The girl's father spreads a white sheet over it and invites the two men to take their place on it. They sit down, one of them taking the bundle of clothes on his lap, the other holding the brass plate with the sweetmeat and the spices. The yoke and the weaving loom are the symbols of the Balahi's principal occupations: agriculture and weaving, and accordingly the Balahis sit on these implements only on solemn occasions.

Now one of the women of the house (who so far have kept in the background, apart from the men) gets up and fetches a brass plate (*arti*) on which she puts a *diya* (small earthen pot filled with *ghi* or oil, to feed a burning wick), *joari* flour, and *kuku*. With the *joari* flour she draws the *chauk*, a magic sign, on the ground before

<sup>49)</sup> Pan = *Piper betle*.

<sup>50)</sup> *Acacia catechu*.

<sup>51)</sup> *Mallotus Philippinensis*.

the sitting men. The *chauk* looks like the spokes of a wheel, the old symbol of the sun, a double swastika, and on all solemn occasions when the gods are called as witnesses, this symbol is drawn on the ground. The other castes and tribes of the country use it as well as the Balahis.

On the *chauk* are placed a *lota* (small brass pot) filled with water, and the *diya*, also called *diwani*. Only well instructed Balahis know that the *chauk* represents Brahma, the *lota* with water Beshnu (Vishnu), while the burning lamp is the symbol of Agni, the god of the hearth-fire. The clothes are thus presented solemnly in the presence of the main Hindu gods. The Balahis assert that on this and on similar occasions of importance these symbols can never be dispensed with. Without the drawing of the *chauk* the whole affair would be invalid.

Now a woman (who is called *sua*) pours *kuku* powder on the clothes in the lap of the man sitting on the yoke. Then she dips her thumb in the red paste and paints the forehead of the two men sitting on the yoke with *kuku*, drawing a line upwards from the spot between the eye-brows to the hair. After her three other women approach and repeat the same ceremony, which obviously is intended as a blessing. The fourth woman takes the bundle of clothes and the brass plate with the sweets and the spices. This she does in the following order: First she puts both hands in a basin with water and places her hands with wide-spread fingers on the clothes, as a sign of blessing. Then she takes the clothes and hands them to the other women. Then, once more, she dips both hands in the water and places them on the shoulders of the two men. Now the boy's father breaks a coconut in half and puts both halves on the brass plate. In the hollow of one piece he puts a silver rupee, into the other half he sprinkles a few crumbs of *gur* (unrefined sugar) and two copper coins. The woman takes the *arti* and passes it on to the other women, and then helps the men to get up from the yoke. The four women now withdraw to the inner room of the house where they dress the girl for whom the garments are intended. As soon as the girl is dressed, the women conduct her to the yoke, where she has to sit down. The boy's father steps forwards and puts two anna pieces on the *arti*, and a copper coin in the *lota* on the *chauk*. Then the four women approach once more one after another and dip their fingers in the *kuku* paste on the *arti* and pass them across the forehead of the girl, from left to right. The last woman, then, dips both hands in the basin of water and places both hands on the bride's shoulders. Then she takes the girl's hands and helps her to get up. The other women, squatting apart, also rise, take the girl in their midst and retire into the house.

The men remain outside. The boy's father is told to pay his fee to the village *panch*: "*Panchati deo!*" For this ceremony sheets are spread upon the ground. The guests as well as the members of the village *panch* sit down on the sheets. After a while the girl's father informs the boy's father how much he has to pay to the *panch*: "*Tin rupya gara, do rupya khan sunawoti, ek rupya bhari tiwari*", which means: Rs. 3 as fee for the *panch*, Rs. 2 for the hearing of the case, and Re. 1 as a tip.

After some bargaining the boy's father pays his dues and the father of the girl adds about two rupees (*kue mokhar* — at his pleasure). Then the *nai* paints everybody's forehead with *kuku* and then his forehead is painted with *kuku* by the boy's father who also gives him as his fee one anna. However, according to good old Balahi custom, the *nai* always demands more, and after some bargaining he receives an additional rupee.

Now the boy's father puts a handful of bright red paint (*gulal*) on the *arti*. The *nai* prepares a paste, pouring a few drops of water on the paint, dips his fingers in the paste and draws lines across the forehead of the celebrating men. Now the boy's father pours yellow or red paint into a *lota* full of water which he then sprinkles on the men's clothes. This is done to bless or simply to express joy.

Meanwhile a meal has been prepared in the house of the bride's father from provisions which have been brought by the boy's father. Before the guests sit down to eat, the *nai* fetches a pot full of warm water and invites them to wash their feet. The father of the bridegroom gives him two annas for this service. After the washing of the feet (*paon dhoni*) the guests are invited to enter the house where the meal has been prepared. If, however, there are many guests to be accommodated, the dinner is served outside on the veranda or in the court-yard. Before the guests begin to eat, the host goes round with *lota* and plate and pours water over the hands of his guests. (To avoid soiling the floor on which the guests are to sit down, he catches the water in the plate.) The meal is served on brass plates; if the number of plates is not sufficient for all guests, several men eat off the same plate. The meal consists of rice, *gur*, *ghi* and sugar. It is called *gur bhatia*.

During the meal the women (who do not eat at the same time) sit a little apart and sing *gali*. These songs are a mixture of mockery and scolding verses, sometimes coarse or indecent, and generally directed against the men who have come to arrange the engagement. This is an expression of resentment because preparations are being made for taking away a daughter of the family. It has, perhaps, also the character of a fertility rite. The women are

paid a few coins for their entertainment which is not at all resented by the guests.

After the meal the guests get up, wash their hands and gather outside the house to chat. Meanwhile the members of the bride's family sit down for their dinner. As it is late in the night all go soon to sleep.

Early next morning the guests get up and dress. After a while the village council is summoned once more. A yoke is placed before the main door of the house, on which the boy's father sits down, his legs tucked-in under his thighs. The bride, dressed in her new bridal garb, is led to him and told to sit down in his lap. Her future father-in-law takes from a corner of his turban (where in a knot the Balahis usually keep their small change) a silver rupee which he puts in the hand of the bride. Then the girl holds out her scarf and the father-in-law pours sweets and other gifts into her lap. After that the girl is allowed to return to the women who are sitting apart.

Meanwhile the men of the village *panch* have arrived. The boy's father distributes *gur* and *pan* among them. As soon as the assembly is complete, the headman of the *panch* says to the bridegroom's father: "*kushtali do* (pay your fee)". The man pays Rs. 4, or less according to his means; the bride's father pays half as much. The money which has been paid to the *panch* on the previous evening is also brought forward and added to the sum now paid. The money is handed over to the *nai* who buys liquor which he serves in the manner described above.

Now the girl's father invites the guests for a meal which is called *sirapuri*. It consists of wheat-bread, broken into crumbs and baked in *ghi* or oil; also rice, *gur* and *ghi* are served. Before the guests begin to eat, they again wash their hands.

After the meal the guests get ready to leave. The bride's father asks them to stay for another day; usually this is only done out of politeness and the guests know better than to accept the invitation. But if they feel that he really means it and they indeed do postpone their departure for a day or two, they expect a particularly good meal: for dinner a chicken, or goat's meat, and a bottle of *daru*!

Taking leave, the host and the guests embrace each other with "Ram, Ram!" The boy's father invites the father of the girl to visit him. As a souvenir he gives him two anna pieces, saying: "Don't forget our agreement! Ram! Ram!" From this day the members of both families are regarded as relatives. The fathers of the children call each other *samdhi*.

This betrothal ceremony is called: *bari mangni*.

(3) Payment of the Bride-price (*dahej kandai*)

About a year after the betrothal the bride-price must be paid. However, if the couple are relatively old the bride-price is sometimes paid soon after the engagement so that the marriage can be celebrated at an early date. But if there is an interval of one or more years between the betrothal and the actual wedding, the boy's father must send clothes for the girl twice a year, on Holi and on Rakhi (Hindu feasts celebrated in March and August). If the clothes are not sent, the engagement is considered as broken.

At the payment of the bride-price the boy's father is accompanied by a few men of his village as witnesses. On their arrival in the village of the bride her father calls the *panch*. When the men have gathered, the bargaining begins. Generally it takes a long time for the men to come to an agreement. The usual amount of a bride-price ranges from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40, but if the girl is very fair, or if her relatives are wealthy and influential, her father may get Rs. 50 and more. Usually the father of the boy or, if he is not a good speaker, a relative or friend, opens the proceedings by asking the father of the girl: "Brother, how many rupees do you want for the girl?" The bride's father replies: "Well, how much are you willing to give?" The boy's father replies that his question should be answered first. The reply comes after some time: "I want Rs. 40." The companions of the boy's father shake their heads and reply that Rs. 40 is far too much: "We give Rs. 25 and not a *paisa* more!" "Well, give Rs. 35 and the marriage can take place tomorrow!" So they bargain until the boy's father agrees to compromise with, say, Rs. 30. If the girl's father is satisfied with this sum, the matter is settled. But if the two men cannot come to terms the other men intervene and assist in the bargaining.

When an agreement is reached, the boy's father is expected to pay the whole amount agreed upon at once and in cash. He also has to pay two rupees to the *panch* as *dahej kandai* (certification) and two rupees as *tip ka paisa* (a free gift to the *panch*). The *nai*, too, gets a rupee. This *tip ka paisa* was formerly paid to the Brahman for casting the horoscopes of the boy and girl. But at present times Balahis have lost faith in the horoscope of the Brahman and often dispense with his service.

Presently the exact date of the wedding is fixed. The Balahis do not require a Brahman to find out the most auspicious day for the wedding. However, the *vivah* marriage must take place either in the month of Magh (January-February), in Phagun (March) before Holi, or in the month of Baisakh (March-April). Only a widow marriage can be concluded at any time of the year. The months from January to April are indeed the most convenient months for weddings,

for so soon after the harvest even the poor Balahis have money to spend. The day of the wedding must always be a Sunday, no matter which Sunday of the month is chosen.

After the exact day of the wedding has been fixed, the guests depart with the words: "Prepare everything for the wedding! We shall do likewise!"

For the institution of the bride-price the following reasons are usually given: The bride-price paid to the girl's parents may be considered as a compensation to her family for the loss of a worker when the girl leaves her parents' house. It is also to a certain degree payment for the girl's upbringing, for the benefits of her education and training will be reaped by the family of her husband. And it is, last not least, a certain guarantee for the stability of the marriage itself. A man is reluctant to divorce his wife, because he knows that he has to spend a lot of money if he takes another wife. And a woman does not run away from her husband without serious provocation, for she is well aware how difficult it will be for her relatives to return the bride-price paid for her. Her father or brother may perhaps even have to repay a part of the expenses of her wedding incurred by her husband. The payment of the bride-price is also an appreciation of the bride's value. A girl is very proud if a large sum has been paid for her. She also knows that the more he pays, the better her husband will treat her.

But on the whole, the institution of the bride-price does not increase the prosperity of the Balahis. Poor as they generally are, they can seldom afford to pay the expenses of a marriage out of their savings. Thus they are obliged to take a loan and the staggering interest they have to pay to the money-lender involves them in heavy financial difficulties. Many a boy whose parents are unable to raise the sum required for his marriage takes service under conditions which differ little from life-long serfdom. Often the choice of a bride depends more on the amount of money a man can pay than on her personal character and liking.

The exact amount of the bride-price depends on many conditions. If the bridegroom's family is wealthy, they have to pay more for the girl. The price is also higher if the boy has some defects which make it difficult to find him a bride. On the other hand, if the bride's family is rich or influential, a higher bride-price is demanded because everyone is anxious to be connected with such a family. If the girl is clever or very fair, her father is entitled to a higher price. A dark skin, cross-eyes, a sick or deformed body often reduce the price of a girl considerably. Fortunately, the girls are usually married off at such an early age that the eventual virtues and deformities, assets or weaknesses which may reduce or increase the amount of the bride-price are not easily detected.

#### (4) The Despatch of the Wedding Clothes

On the Thursday preceding the wedding-day the groom's father must send the wedding clothes for the bride. Two of his relatives are sent to the bride's house to hand them over, as also the *haldi* (turmeric, *Curcuma longa*) with which the bride will be anointed. The messengers are called *haldia*. When they arrive at the bride's village, usually late in the afternoon, the *nai* is summoned. As soon as he appears a yoke is placed on the ground before the main entrance of the house, a cloth is spread over it and a *chauk* drawn in front of it with *joari* flour. A *lota* which contains water and a copper coin is placed on the *chauk*. The bride's father puts two anna pieces on a brass plate near the *chauk*. The two messengers are invited to sit down on the yoke. Four women come and paint the forehead of the *haldia* with *kuku*. The fourth woman holds up the corners of her scarf and the messengers lay the bundle of clothes into her lap. The women withdraw and go to dress the bride. After a while the bride is brought before the two messengers and told to sit down in front of them. Her father once more puts two anna pieces on the *arti* and throws a *paisa* into the *lota*. The four women apply *kuku* to the forehead of the girl. After that the bride gets up and returns to the house. The four anna pieces on the plate are given to the four women while the two copper coins in the *lota* are taken by the *nai*.

Meanwhile a meal is prepared for the two messengers, it consists of rice, *dal*, and *gur*. The *nai* prepares hot water for the guests to wash their feet and is paid an anna for this service. While the *haldia* step aside and wash themselves, the girl's father gives four annas to the assembled *panch* who keep three annas for themselves and give one anna to the messengers. After the meal the two guests receive again two anna coins from the girl's father. After that they take leave and return to their village, but if it is already too late in the evening, they may stay for the night.

#### (5) The Anointment with *haldi*

On the evening of the same day — that is on the Thursday before the wedding day — the bridegroom as well as the bride are anointed with *haldi*.

In preparation for it a strange ceremony takes place which is called *khan-pati*. A brother or other near relative of the bridegroom, (or the bride) and his wife (for whom no other woman can be substituted) are the acting persons. A corner of the man's loincloth (*dhotti*) is tied to a corner of his wife's scarf. This is called *chapalaw bandhna*. Then the man takes a *pirana* (goat for

driving bullocks), while his wife lifts two empty baskets upon her head. In this attire both walk out of the house, surrounded by a group of singing women. One of the women carries a brass plate with *kuku*, rice grain, *pan*, *joari* flour, *supari*, and a copper coin. A few steps away from the door, on the so-called *angan*, they stop. A woman smears fresh manure on a square before the couple's feet. Then a *chauk* is drawn on the spot with *joari* flour, and five pebbles<sup>52</sup>), *kuku*, *pan*, and the other ingredients are placed on the *chauk*. After a little while everything except the pebbles is taken off and replaced on the *arti*. Now the bridegroom's (or bride's) brother takes his *pirana* and, assisted by four women who grip the *pirana* at its lower end, digs up the mud on the spot where the *chauk* is drawn. The joint digging of the man and the four women, naturally, causes much merry confusion and is accomplished not without difficulty. Then the wife of the bride-groom's brother squats down on the ground with another woman whose hands she takes in hers. Jointly the women take up five handfuls of mud and throw them into one of the baskets. Now two other women take out the mud from one basket and throw it into the other. This is called *adla badla* (exchange). The mud is called *sagun ki matti* (auspicious mud). Of this mud the *chulha* is made, the hearth, on which the bride's bathwater is warmed on her wedding day. This ceremony is probably a fertility rite, though its exact meaning is unknown to the Balahis.

Now the couple return to the door. But the other women bar the entrance and force the couple to pronounce each other's names, before they admit them to enter. It is against the modesty of a woman to call her husband by name, and likewise a man will only reluctantly say the name of his wife. The woman usually gets out of the dilemma by reciting a verse which contains the name of her husband, while the latter replies with another verse in which the name of his wife is hidden. For instance (we assume that the names of the couple are Gopal and Daili), Daili recites:

*Khet men kundo — Gopal mero phundo*

On the field grows weed — but Gopal is my flower!

And Gopal sings:

*Matho par dhani — Daili meri rani.*

On my head a burden — is Daili my queen.

This ceremony is called: *nam batana* (telling of names). It is an occasion of much harmless jesting for the women taking part in this ceremony.

<sup>52</sup>) The five pebbles represent "gods" whose names are unknown.

It must, however, be noted that this ceremony of *khan-pati* is not everywhere performed in the same manner.

After the *khan-pati* the bridegroom, or the bride, is anointed with *haldi*. In the inner room of the house, sometimes on the veranda before the door, the floor is coated with fresh manure and a big *chauk* is drawn with *joari* flour. Within the big *chauk* a number of smaller ones are drawn. The boy (or girl) is told to sit down in the centre of the big *chauk*. A stone, representing Ganpati, is placed before him (or her). On each corner of the *chauk* a *lota* is placed, while a fifth *lota* is put beside the image of Ganpati. The five *lotas* are connected by five threads. If a thread breaks during the binding, it is believed that the marriage will not last. The threads are wound seven times round the *lotas*. This is done to keep away evil spirits which might attack the child during the anointment. The four anointing women, called *sua*, must sit within the magic square, kept safe by the sevenfold threads around the *lotas*. Now the mother of the child, or an other woman acting in this capacity (*sagij-ma*), takes a small pot filled with a mixture of *dhanya*, *haldi*, *channa*, *pan*, and oil, and puts the pot on the child's head. The boy (or girl) is stripped naked to the waist; a sheet is thrown over the child under the cover of which the anointment is performed. When the mother begins to sing a hymn, the four women pour *kuku* over the child, then dip their fingers into the *haldi* paste in the pot and begin to rub it all over the body, beginning with the fingers of the right hand.

After the anointment the four women get up and dance upon the *chauk* till every trace of it is extinguished; this is called: *Ganpati morna* (to destroy Ganpati). Then the bridegroom is dressed in an old loin-cloth and an equally dirty and ragged shirt, he wears a woman's neck-ring (*takli*) and a silver chain around his neck. In his hand he must hold a short dagger (*katthar*) with a broad steel blade in a red cloth-sheath, and a handle with a hole in its centre big enough to pass four fingers through. Two small bags are attached to the dagger, one contains *pan* spices, the other a copper coin or a button instead of the coin. The bride too is dressed similarly in old, outworn clothes. A small knife, or a *pan*-cutter, is tied into the corner of her scarf, as protective magic against malignant spirits.

The dirty attire of the bridegroom and the bride is intended to deceive the evil spirits bent on harming the children at this critical time of life. The Balahis hope that when the *bhuts* see them attired in dirty clothes, the boy even wearing a woman's neck-ring and chain they will find the children too contemptible to notice them.

The *katthar* and the small knife in the bride's scarf are amulets against the particularly dangerous Dongar Deo. This god was formerly a boy who on the day of his marriage was killed and eaten by a tiger. It is said that Dongar Deo often causes a strange sickness, the symptoms of which are a stiffening of the neck and a subsequent bending of the spine. The Balahis believe also that the *katthar* is the counterpart of the dagger which Bhawani Mata gave to Ravana for protection against his enemies. The dagger is bought ready-made in the bazaar and is used also by other Hindu castes at the marriage<sup>53</sup>).

During the time of the anointment two small boys are present. They sit just outside the *chauk* and eat wheat cakes (*ghungri*) with both hands. But as soon as the anointment is over the boys are chased away. The meaning of this curious rite is not known.

After that the *nai*, or a near relative of the bride-groom or the bride, takes the anointed child on his hip and carries him (or her) through the village. The women meanwhile sing a hymn in honour of *Mahadeo-Shankar*. This procession through the village is called *chhorwana* (weaning) and symbolises the gradual maturing of the child until now entirely under the affectionate care of the parents. The *chhorwana* is repeated on each subsequent evening till the wedding day, each day the procession going further and further away from the paternal house. Sometimes, on the way, the village notables are visited and asked for small gifts.

After the return of the procession the women squat for hours on their heels and sing, never tiring, their endless monotonous hymns. Occasionally, on the spur of the moment, a woman gets up and dances, stooping low and swaying her arms alternately to the rhythm of the singing.

On the next morning the boy as well as the girl are again anointed in their respective homes, and in the evening they are carried through the village, as described above.

The anointing with *haldi* which is generally used as an anti-septic medicament is a symbolic act whereby the bodies of the bride and groom are believed to become fit and healthy and purified for married life.

The anointing is also performed in remembrance of Krishna's wedding with the fair Rukmini, the 'saffron-coloured'.

<sup>53</sup>) The Rajput dagger, called *katthar*, originally had three blades. By a mechanism in the handle, the blades shut like scissors after the dagger had been driven into the body of the opponent. The open dagger, with a longer two-edged blade between two side blades, may have had a phallic significance, of which the Balahis are no more aware.

(6) The Erection of the Marriage Booth (*mandap*)

On Friday morning in the bridegroom's village, on Saturday morning in the village of the bride, the marriage *mandap* is erected. It is a leaf-covered hut, similar to the field-watchers' hut, of light and perishable structure. This *mandap* is supposed to signify the transitory and unstable character of human life and happiness. Under this marriage hut all the wedding rites are performed.

From every family of the Balahi community in the village a man is invited to help in the building of the *mandap*. As soon as the men have assembled they proceed to the nearest jungle. On a bullock-cart they take *joari* cakes, vegetables (*amari ki bhaji*), *kuku*, rice, *pan*, *supari*, a *paisa*, and a smouldering dung-cake (*kanda*). Under a Salai stripling (*Boswellia serrata*) they stop. Before cutting down the tree they appease its spirit by applying *kuku*, burning incense, and making obeisance. This is done once for all the trees which have to be cut for the *mandap*. Nine Salai trees are cut down for the bridegroom's *mandap*, twelve for the bride's *mandap*. The trees are stripped of branches and leaves and loaded on the bullock-cart. Then the men sit down and eat the *joari* bread and the vegetables which they have brought. After that they all return home.

Before the house of the groom (or the bride) the cart is unloaded. Four men take a *belai* (fork-shaped piece of wood or iron for digging holes) and dig holes at the four corners of the marriage hut. Four women come and paint the men's foreheads with *kuku*. Each digger gets two copper coins for his work. When the holes are deep enough sour milk (*dahi*) and rice-grain (*bhat*) are poured into the holes and then the poles are set up. These poles are painted with *kuku*. When the corner-poles have been erected one pole (in the boy's *mandap*) or two poles (in the bride's *mandap*) are set up on each side of the marriage hut. Then light poles are laid across the top-forks of the corner-poles, and the whole frame-work is tied firmly with strings and bark-ropes. The roof is covered with branches and large leaves of the Salai tree.

The men are almost the whole day busy with the erection of the *mandap*, for there are many who shout orders and give advice, but only a few who really work. After the last finishing touches have been given to the *mandap* a man ties a red cotton string with pipal and mango leaves and pieces of *joari* bread round the *mandap*. This is called *mandap sutharna* (decoration of the *mandap*). The man who ties the strings, is given a handful of rice to eat. The man who ties the last leaf or the last morsel of *joari* bread, is beaten by his companions. While the men are thus busy adorning the *mandap*, they tease and joke with each other, and even go so far

as to tie one another's hair or loin-cloth together. They also remember their dead relatives who would have enjoyed this wedding-feast with them and in memory of the dead they throw a handful of rice into the air. While the *mandap* is being built, the women sing obscene or mocking songs. During the offering to the dead, however, they sing dirges.

After the men have got tired of their jokes, they sit down for a meal which has been prepared for them meanwhile by the women of the celebrating party.

Later on, after the villagers have left, the head of the celebrating family erects another pole in the middle of the *mandap*. Only the nearest relatives of the same *kul* (clan) help him. This pole is about two feet higher than the corner-poles and protrudes from the roof of the *mandap*. It is called *mardalai*. In the hole in which the *mardalai* pole is set up the head of the family pours *dahi* and *bhat*, *pan*, *supari*, a few grains of wheat and a copper coin. To the top of the pole is attached a *lota* containing a few grains of wheat. The whole is wrapped in a red cloth. The *mardalai* represents the clan god (or goddess) whose presence is desired for the impending marriage as a protector and witness of the wedding. Some clans perform special offerings on this occasion, and even sacrifice a goat in honour of the clan god.

In the afternoon of the same day girls and young women build of the mud preserved from the *khan-pati* ceremony a *chulha* (hearth), and other hearths and pots in miniature. These are then carried in procession to a nearby river and there sprinkled with water before being brought back to the house. The main *chulha* is placed in a corner of the veranda. An earthen water-pot (*ghara*) crowned with red strings and amulets is placed on the hearth. In this water-pot the bath-water is warmed on the wedding-day for the bridegroom (or the bride).

On Sunday morning, or already on Saturday evening if the bride's home is far away, the bridegroom's father calls on his relatives and friends and invites them to the wedding. Only those who are invited may take part. Soon all get busy with the preparations for the journey. The bullock carts are oiled and repaired, a gaily coloured cover is laid over the bamboo frame of the cart roof, the bullocks too are covered with a back-cloth and bells are hung around their necks; even their horns are painted a bright blue or red. The wedding guests themselves bathe, eat and dress for the journey.

The bridegroom is bathed with special ceremonies. Under the *mandap* is placed a yoke on which he is told to squat down. His clothes are stripped, under the cover of a sheet, by the four women who had anointed him with *haldi* at the previous ceremony. One

woman now pours water over the body and all the women rub him clean of the grease of the *haldi* paste. If the bride-groom is very young, no covering sheet is required. After the bath a near relative of the boy embraces him from behind, putting his arms around the back, arms, and legs as he squats on the yoke. In this position he lifts him up and carries him, stepping backwards, into the house. The four women await him at the door and slap the man on his back and arms, till he disappears in the interior. This is done in remembrance of Krishna's rescue by Vasudeo who carried him through the Jumna river to safety.

In the main room of the house a white sheet is spread on the floor. The boy is set down on it, while the women come in and wipe him dry. After that the bridegroom is dressed by the *naî*. First he dons a new *dhotti*, then a shirt, often of silk, also a bright red waistcoat or a long red coat. The new red turban (*pagri*) which he is to wear, is always tied by his father or another near relative. Then a *mendal* fruit is wrapped in a piece of cloth and tied, with a woman's hair-string, round his right wrist. He has to wear it during the wedding ceremonies. This armlet is called *kakan*.

When the bridegroom is dressed, the women bring a plate with rice, *gur* and *ghi*, and feed the groom who is not allowed to use his own hands. The women play with him and tease him by withdrawing their hands with the tempting morsels whenever he opens his mouth. From now until the wedding is over the bridegroom is not allowed to speak.

After the meal the groom is left alone with his mother. A sheet is spread over both. It is said that sometimes the mother offers her son the breast as an expression of her love and affection.

When the bridegroom leaves the house, a large sheet is spread between the two front poles of the *mandap*, as high as the boy's chest. His mother or the woman acting in this capacity approaches from the other side of the sheet and touches his head and feet seven (sometimes only three) times with a butter-churning stick, with a grain-pestle, a winnowing fan, and a broom of *khans* grass. While the other domestic tools are put back to their usual place, the broom is thrown on the roof of the *mandap*. The women apply *kuku*, first to the two poles to which the sheet is tied, then to the forehead of the groom. Then each of the four women embrace him, cheek to cheek. After that the sheet is taken off and the wedding party gets ready to start.

(The same ceremonies are performed in the house of the bride, just before the arrival of the bridegroom.)

The departure of the wedding party is timed so that they reach the home of the bride at about 5 p.m.

Just outside the bridegroom's village, at the shrine of Hanuman, the party halts and the bridegroom alights. He offers a coconut to the god to obtain a safe journey and the god's blessing for the wedding. Then he returns to the cart and continues the journey. One cart follows the other at a merry pace, the neck bells of the bullocks jingle and the cart-drivers shout and click their tongues.

The wedding party is called *barat*.

### Chapter XIII

#### The Wedding Ceremonies (*vivah*)

##### (1) Arrival of the *barat*

In the bride's village all are on the lookout for the arrival of the *barat*. Boys climb trees to be able the sooner to announce the coming of the bullock-carts. When their approach is announced, the musicians are called to stand ready. They and the nearest relatives of the bride assemble on the road before the entrance to the village. As soon as the bullock carts arrive, the musicians begin to play; if the bride's family cannot afford to engage a whole band, they at least hire the player of the indispensable *sing*.

When the bullock carts of the wedding party stop, the *nai* of the bridegroom's village alights first and takes the bridegroom on his hip. He is met by the *nai* of the bride's party who offers him a *lota* full of water, into which the father of the bridegroom throws two *paisa*. Now the *nai* pours water into the hollow of the right hand of four relatives who surround the bridegroom. The men sip the water, gargle and spit it out. Only then do the relatives of the bride approach, embrace and greet their guests with "Ram! Ram!"

Then the bridegroom's father takes copper coins in his hand, moves them in a circle over the head of his son and throws them towards the musicians. A wild scramble ensues among the players to secure the coins. This is called *norauni*. The money given to the musicians is believed to bring luck to the groom. The *nai* receives two *paisa* in his *lota*; that is his fee for the service he has rendered at the reception of the *barat* party.

Now the *nai* of the guests' party moves on, the bridegroom riding on his hip. The musicians begin to play a merry tune, guests and villagers mix freely, and numerous on-lookers join in the universal merry-making. Among the higher Hindu castes the bridegroom rides a horse when he enters the village of the bride, but the low-caste Balahis must be content to arrive on the hip of the barber.

For the *barat* party a special house has been prepared, at some distance from the bride's house. It is called *janwasa* which means guest-house. Sheets are spread in front of the house and the guests invited to sit down. The bridegroom is given the place of honour. It is about 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The bride's father now asks the bridegroom's father to send the wedding clothes for the bride.

Before the entrance to the *janwasa* a yoke, or the pole of a handloom, is placed on the ground and covered with a sheet. Two men (called *legnia*), one with the bride's clothes in his arms, take their place on the yoke. A *chauk* is drawn in front of them and on it are placed a *lota* with water and a *diya*. Four women come and paint the men's foreheads with *kuku*. The last woman receives the bundle of clothes from the men seated on the yoke. Now all the women proceed to the home of the bride where the latter is given a bath, accompanied by ceremonies which have been described above at the bridegroom's bathing. After the bride has been dressed, she is adorned with all the ornaments which her family can afford to display. Like the bridegroom the bride wears the *kakan* on her wrist.

When the bride is dressed up, word is sent to the bridegroom's party who at once gets ready for the procession to the bride's house. For it is there that the actual marriage will take place. The procession proceeds in a loose, disorderly group, preceded by the musicians playing noisy tunes and accompanied by a crowd of people shouting merrily. The bridegroom is carried by the *nai*. About half way from the house of the bride, a small girl meets the wedding procession, a *lota* with water on her head. The relatives of the bridegroom throw a coin into the *lota*, dip their fingers in the water and sprinkle the drops to the four winds, to ward off evil spirits. If on the way the party meets high-caste women carrying water pots, they ask them to sprinkle water on them, as a blessing. The women are paid a few coins, if they comply with the wish.

On his way to the house of the bride the bridegroom wears on his forehead the wedding crown, called *maul*. It is usually of paper, crudely adorned with gold and silver tinsels, long trimmings and fringes which almost cover his face. The bride wears a similar, though simpler and smaller crown. The *maul* is bought in the bazaar which fact suggests that the Balahis have adopted this custom from the Hindus. Sometimes the *maul* is made of palm leaves, interwoven with plaits which reach down to the feet. This kind of wedding crown is made by Katia Balahis and costs much more than the paper crown, often a rupee and a quarter or more is paid for such a crown.

## (2) The Wedding-Rite

Bridegroom and bride meet now under the *mandap*, often for the first time in their life. Both are told to stand on the yoke, the bride to the left of the groom. Now the *bhat*, or a near relative, takes the right hand of the bridegroom and with his left hand the bride's right hand, holding one hand over the other within a hand-breadth's distance. The Balahi Brahman, or in his absence another Balahi, climbs on the roof of a near house and is on the look-out for the exact moment when the sun touches the sky-line. At the right moment he shouts:

*Do dala dukh Bham jana sadana boli Bhesh saura karan sidh karo Gauri ka putra Ganesh.*

*Pratham sauru garu dev apan duja dev Ganesh tija Sumru tina jana: Brahma, Beshnu, Mahesh!*

Which means: At first I pray to the guru who has taken away the stain of my sins by God's grace. Thus Ganesh, Gauri's son, who of all the gods performs the marriage, may bless bridegroom and bride in the name of the three persons: Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh.

When the sun is half down behind the sky-line, he shouts: *Panch iswa lagin prabat saph dhane*: 5 times I say: be attentive and careful:

*Nau iswa lagin prabat saph dhane*: 9 times I say: be attentive and careful!

*Gyara iswa lagin prabat saph dhane*: 11 times I say: be attentive and careful!

*Satra iswa lagin prabat saph dhane*: 17 times I say: be attentive and careful!

*Ekkis iswa lagin prabat saph dhane*: 21 times I say: be attentive and careful!

Then he adds: "Attention! As soon as I clap my hands, put their hands together. Are you ready?" As soon as he claps his hands, the *bhat* joins the hands of bride and groom — they are married! The musicians begin to play and people shout in excitement.

Hand in hand the married couple is told to sit down on the yoke. The boy's shoulders are covered with a white cloth about five yards in length. The bride is covered with a similar cloth in the corners of which the *nai* ties a *paisa* and a *supari*, then he knots the corners of both cloths together. He now opens the hands of the newly married. The groom's father gives to the *nai* two annas while the man who pronounced the blessing on the roof of the house is given four annas. First the *nai* and then the Balahi Brahman put *kuku* on the forehead of the married couple; each receives two anna pieces for doing it. Next the four women

approach and paint the forehead of the bride and the groom with *kuku*, they receive two anna pieces to divide between themselves.

The *nai* now assists groom and bride in getting up. The mother or an elder sister of the bride leads the couple away into the house. The other women meanwhile sit apart and sing wedding songs which are not without obscene and sexual allusions. In the house bride and groom are told to sit down facing each other. The bridal crowns are taken off and a plate with a mixture of rice, *gur*, *ghi* and sugar is placed between them. The bride is directed to take a morsel and to put it into the groom's mouth. This must be done five times. Then the bridegroom has to feed his bride five times in the same manner. After that the two are separated, the boy is led back to the *mandap* while the girl stays in the house with the women.

### (3) The Wedding-Banquet

The bride's father, then, gives a banquet of which villagers and guests partake. The bridegroom is seated in the place of honour under the *mandap* surrounded by his nearest relatives. He is served first. The dishes consist of rice, *dal*, *gur* or sugar, and *ghi*. When the groom begins to eat, the other people follow suit. The bride sits apart from the men with the women.

After dinner the men begin to sing and to dance and this continues until late into the night. But whoever wants to go to sleep early, is free to leave.

### (4) The Day after the Wedding

On Monday morning, at dawn, when the bridegroom gets up to go out for a call of nature he is accompanied by his male relatives and the musicians. After he has washed his face and his hands at a near well or a stream, he returns in procession to the *janwasa* where all sit down. Soon the *nai* is ordered to call the village council. When the villagers arrive, a relative of the bride addresses the bridegroom's father: "Brother, give something to the *panch*!" The man complies and pays about five rupees, besides two rupees to the *nai*, and a rupee each to the Balahi Brahman and the *bhat*. The singing women receive about four annas, while two annas are put on the plate from which the newly married couple had fed each other. This money is called *bhane*, i. e. a fee for the use of the plate. Meanwhile four to five women come from the bride's house in procession, carrying a plate with *kuku*. They paint the bridegroom's forehead with *kuku*, drawing the paint with four fingers across his forehead. Then they begin to sing; the song must not be specially composed for the occasion, any song will do. The bridegroom's father pays a silver rupee to the women and distributes *pan*.

Then a meal is prepared for the guests. As a special dish goat's meat is served. But so the Balahis say, goat's meat tastes better with a drink of liquor and at the request of the guests the bridegroom's father buys a few bottles (for about Rs. 4) which are drunk before the meal. This is served by the *nai* in the usual manner. All adult men drink, after sprinkling a few drops on the ground and greeting the others: *Ram, Ram!* Then they sit down to partake of the meal, the bridegroom in the place of honour. After the meal the men wash their hands and sit down to chat.

The bridegroom, however, is again brought to the marriage *mandap*. There the bride joins him, and both sit down on the yoke, close together, surrounded by the women of the house. A *chauk* is drawn before them on the ground. A woman brings splinters of mango and akhau wood, piles them on the *chauk*, and with cotton wool soaked in *ghī* lights a fire. A *lota* with water is placed beside the fire. The nearest relatives of the newly wedded couple are called together: The fathers, brothers, fathers' fathers (if alive) and fathers' brothers. The *nai* puts a mixture of rice and *dal* (pulse) in the hollow of the hands of the bridegroom, the bride, and of their relatives. He then says: "Give me a *paisa*!" Each of the men gives him a *paisa*. This money is called *gyari jimana*. The *nai* then asks: "Has the bride now been received into the clan of the bridegroom?" After all have replied in the affirmative, he adds: "Receive her with affection and treat her well!" This ceremony signifies the transfer of the bride from her parents' clan to that of her husband.

Now the bride and the groom are told to get up from the yoke. The groom steps behind his bride and takes her hands in his. *Joari* grains are poured into the hollow of the bride's hands. Then the bridegroom gently pushes his bride before him, while she throws at each step *joari* grains into the air. When they reach the fire, the groom opens the hands of the bride wholly and allows the rest of the grains in her hands to drop into the fire. Then he puts his hands on the shoulders of the bride and both walk five times around the *mandap*. This is called *chauri* (going round) and is an act of worship to the clan god, or to Agni, the god of the hearth-fire.

Now the *nai* invites the relatives and friends of the newly married couple to offer their wedding gifts. He says: "Where are your wedding gifts? What did you bring for the newly married couple? Give them a horse, or a pair of bullocks, or at least some silver ornaments or a bedstead!" One after the other the wedding guests approach and present their gifts: money, clothes, silver rings, or brass plates. They place their presents on a plate in front of the young couple and then touch with folded hands the feet of groom

and bride. Each time the *nai* announces the name of the giver and the kind of his present.

When all have presented their gifts, bridegroom and bride get up, and the groom again places his hands on the shoulders of the bride and walks with her twice around the *mandap*. Then the father of the bride calls for a *supra* (winnowing fan), puts a handful of boiled rice on the rim, with his finger he makes a little hole in the rice, pours *ghi* into it and lights a wick. A cloth is wrapped round his shoulders to protect the flame against the breeze. The winnowing fan is then quickly handed over to the bridegroom's father. This ceremony signifies the transfer of the bride from the clan of her parents to that of her husband.

The groom's father carries the *supra* to the *janwasa*, accompanied by the guests and villagers who carry the wedding gifts (*datja*). It is already about three o'clock in the afternoon.

After a short pause the bridegroom bathes, while the bride is bathed by the attending women at home. Then the groom again joins the bride and the whole party proceeds to the *patel* (headman) of the village and to other prominent people in the village. Groom and bride make obeisance before the *patel*, touching with folded hands his feet, and pay one and a quarter rupee to him. This is the customary marriage fee to which in many villages the landlord or *patel* is entitled. The newly married couple, in return, receives a small gift in cash or grain from the *patel*. After all the prominent men of the village have been visited the party proceeds to the shrine of Hanuman. There the bridegroom offers the *kakan* (the *mendal* fruit tied round his wrist), also a coconut, *kuku*, *sendhur* (vermilion), *supari*, and other ingredients usually presented as offerings. When the bridegroom puts the *kakan* down before the image of the god, he says: "*Kakan bandhi chhor agaya hung*. (I have come to loosen the *kakan*)". Sometimes the *kakan* is offered to another *deo* or *mata*, or simply thrown into a stream. The *kakan* is the symbol of the bond which now unites bride and groom for ever. It thus means as much as the wedding ring of western people. Sometimes the *kakan* is offered after the arrival of the party at the bridegroom's village. Women loosen the *kakan* amid jesting and go then in procession to offer it at the shrine of Hanuman.

After that the wedding guests find that it is about time for them to take leave, for now everything has been done according to custom. The carts are made ready, and the bullocks are yoked. Before the bridegroom's party leaves, the father of the groom says to his *samdhi* (bride's father): "If any mistake has been made, pardon me! Farewell! When will you come to call for your daughter?" The bride's father replies: "I am a simple man. Everything has

been done according to our customs. I have given you my daughter. Treat her well. How many men shall I bring with me when I come to call for my daughter?" The groom's father states the number of guests he is willing and able to entertain, usually ten to twenty. Then the date of the visit is fixed, from two to twenty days after the wedding. During the interval the father of the bridegroom has to make the necessary arrangements for the dinner which he will have to give for the guests.

At last the wedding party is ready to take off. The boy's father gives his *samdhi* two anna pieces as a souvenir, then he embraces him and greets him with "Ram, Ram!" and the other men too embrace each other. The women take leave of the bride who now leaves her home perhaps for the first time in her life, in company of people who until a few days ago were perfect strangers to her. No relative of hers accompanies her, she has to go alone with her husband. The women, in particular the mother of the girl, cry bitterly, and so does the bride who at such a tender age cares nothing for her strange boy-husband with whom she has perhaps never exchanged a word! However, the girl does not take leave for good — after a few days she returns to her parents' house where she remains until she is mature.

When the wedding party crosses a river or *nala* on the return journey, the bridegroom and the bride offer *joari* grain soaked in *haldi* (*pila dhana*) to the god of the river for a successful crossing.

The wedding party is expected by the bridegroom's relatives and the villagers who did not attend the wedding with great curiosity and excitement. They all go to meet the carts as soon as the neck bells of the bullocks and the shouts of the drivers are heard from afar. Everyone wants to see the bride.

After the ceremonial reception of the travellers by the women of the groom's family a meal is served. By this time it is generally late in the evening and soon all go to bed. But the young couple do not sleep in the parents' house, another house is vacated for them for the night. It is called *janvasa*. The next morning the young bride is brought to the *patel* and to other notables of the village and the caste. Bride and groom touch the feet of the *patel* with folded hands and receive a small present from him.

#### The Bride Returns Home (*baurha*)

During her stay at the house of her parents-in-law the bride is not encouraged to see much of her boy-husband, nor is she allowed to sleep with him. Married life begins only after a few years when she has menstruated for the first time.

After a few days, her relatives come to take her home. They arrive late in the evening and are received with some formality. Often musicians are hired for the occasion. A house has been made ready for the guests where they may stay for the time of their visit. Soon after their arrival they are entertained with a meal which consists of goat's meat, rice and *gur*. This meal is called *gur bhatya*. After the meal the guests go to sleep. The next morning they are invited to attend a meeting of the village council which assembles at the *janwasa*. The bride's father now pays his fees to the village *panch*: one and a quarter rupee to the *panch*, a rupee to the *nai*, four annas to the singing women, two annas on the plate which was used for the *haldi* anointing, and small gifts are also made to the *kotwal* (village watchman), to the sweeper of the village and to beggars.

After the *panch* has been satisfied, a meal is given to the guests and to all the villagers. If the bridegroom's father can afford it, he also orders a few bottles of *daru*. As soon as the supper is over, the guests prepare to leave. The bride's father gives an anna piece (*wolak ka paisa*) as a souvenir to his *samdhi*. They embrace each other and say Ram! Ram! The bride takes leave of the women but not of her husband. This return of the bride to her house is called *baurha*.

From this day the girl lives at her parents' home until her first menstruation. She rarely sees her husband, for even if he comes to visit her parents it is thought improper if she shows herself to him.

## Chapter XIV

### Other Forms of Marriage

#### (1) Widow-Marriage (*natra pad*)

A Balahi woman is regarded as a widow if her husband dies after the celebration of the *vivah* wedding, whether the marriage was consummated or not. Balahi widows are permitted to remarry. Of all the Balahi females of the Nimar District between the ages of 17 and 23 2.5 per cent were widowed (very few of whom will permanently remain widows); the percentage of widows in the age-group between 24 and 43 was 16.7 (some of these widows will remarry, but a good number of them will remain single because they are either no more marriageable or because they do not want to be separated from their children). 68.0 per cent of Balahi females over 44 years of age were widows<sup>54</sup>).

<sup>54</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, p. 201.

When a widow remarries the ceremonies performed differ considerably from the *vivah* rites. No woman be she widowed or divorced can go twice through the *vivah* wedding ritual. A woman remarrying is joined to her new partner by a ritual called *natra pad*.

The Balahis permit marriage by *natra pad* rites only if either partner has previously been married by *vivah* rites. If a man whether he has married previously by *vivah* rites or not wants to marry a yet unmarried girl, he must marry her by *vivah* rites, while a girl who once has been married by *vivah* rites cannot go through them a second time. She therefore cannot marry a yet unmarried man but only a widower or divorcee or a man who wants to accept her as a second or third wife. Nor do the Balahis allow marriage by *natra pad* rites before either partner has reached puberty. A girl therefore whose husband by *vivah* marriage dies before they began to live together cannot remarry before she has her first menstruation.

Differences of age are no concern in this marriage though only in rare cases is the husband younger than his wife.

#### (a) The Betrothal

When a man wants to take another wife, he asks his father (or uncle, or elder brother) to look out for a suitable woman. When she has been found, he asks his nearest relatives and a few caste-fellows of the village to accompany him to the village where the girl lives. When they arrive at the village, they do not immediately proceed to the house of the bride-to-be, but stop at a distance and send a messenger ahead to contact her father or guardian. If the latter is inclined to consider a marriage proposal, he invites the match-makers to the house of a friend or relative where they can discuss the affair without being overheard by the woman in question. He also invites the members of the village *panch* to assist him in the parley.

If no prohibitive degree of relationship exists between the prospective partners and the other circumstances are favourable to the match, the woman is called and asked if she is prepared to marry her suitor. According to Balahi etiquette she should not look at the man who wants to marry her, but few women deny themselves a quick but searching glance at a suitor. If he is not too old or ugly, a girl will not lightly reject a proposal of which her relatives approve. For though in theory a widow is free to marry when and whom she wants, she knows well that sooner or later she has to marry unless she is already too old or has a couple of children from her former husband. Her relatives will not allow her to remain single for long, especially when they

have reason to fear that she might entangle herself in an intrigue. Sometimes the relatives of a widow are anxious to marry her off because they are in need of money, for the bride-price of a widow is comparatively high. But if a widow firmly rejects a marriage proposal, and she cannot be persuaded to change her mind, the negotiations are broken off. A woman, however, who has given cause for scandal is not asked for her consent to a marriage, she must accept the husband whom her relatives and the village *panch* choose for her.

As a rule, the bride-price for a widow amounts to Rs. 125. About 30 or 40 years ago as much as Rs. 300 or 400 were paid for a widow, but nowadays few Balahis are able to pay as much. Often a woman is given away for less than a hundred rupees. The amount of money which is demanded for a widow depends on various circumstances: if the woman is beautiful, or very young, or skilled at work, her relatives will demand a high bride-price. Likewise, if her suitor is a rich man, or if the woman is of a wealthy or influential family. The amount of the bride-price fluctuates also with the financial position of the Balahis in general. Because in the last forty years the Balahis generally have become poorer, the customary price of Rs. 125 for a widow is scarcely ever paid. Just before the second world-war several widows were married off for as little as Rs. 25! Another reason for this decrease of the bride-price is also that in recent years quite a number of widows did not wait until their relatives found a suitable husband for them, but ran away with a lover. To prevent such unpleasant affairs, the Balahis were obliged to arrange quickly for the remarriage of a widowed daughter or sister. Naturally they could not wait till a rich man turned up, but gave the woman away in marriage to the first comer even if he offered a low price.

When after much bargaining the amount of the bride-price is settled, the relatives of the bridegroom are asked how much they are able to pay on the spot. At least a quarter of the full amount must be paid at once, or the negotiations are broken off. When the bridegroom's party can pay a portion of the bride-price in cash, the bride is called once more. The bridegroom who has so far kept in the background and has had no say in the actual negotiations now comes forward to meet the bride. He puts a ring (*mundi*) on the little finger of her right hand. This ceremony is called: *Sai men mundi dena* and signifies the conclusion of the betrothal. The woman is now engaged to the man who has put the ring on her finger and no other man has a right to carry her off as long as she wears his ring. By accepting the ring the woman has expressed her consent to the marriage and is bound to honour her promise.

After that the relatives of the bridegroom pay the first instalment of the bride-price. A man is sent to the liquor shop for some bottles of *daru* for which the bridegroom, or his father, has to pay. The bride's father adds half the amount to what the bridegroom has paid for some additional bottles. The amount of money spent on liquor depends on the amount of the bride-price and the number of Balahis in the village where the engagement is celebrated.

The *nai* of the village is called to serve the liquor. The bridegroom's father or another near relative is offered the first glass. With grave formality he raises his glass and says: "I will drink the liquor of the betrothal. Is there any doubt or difficulty which still remains to be settled?" The others reply: "No, no! You may drink!" The man says "Ram! Ram!" and drinks the liquor. After him the other guests are served, last of all the *nai* receives his share.

Then a meal is prepared for the guests at the bride's house. It is called *gur bhatya*, and consists of rice, *dal*, *ghi*, *gur*, or sugar. After the meal the guests soon leave and return to their village.

The betrothal of a widow may take place on any day of the year, and at any time of the day. Sometimes the men do not come to an agreement on their first visit, but have to call on the woman's relatives a second or third time, for all questions to be solved to general satisfaction.

#### (b) The Marriage (*natra pad*)

A widow's marriage takes place either on a Tuesday or on a Saturday in the bride's village. The bridegroom's party arrives in the evening, only men attending the ceremony.

The relatives of the bride and the fellow-villagers receive the wedding party outside the village; the only musician is the *sing*-player. The bridegroom is accompanied only by his nearest relatives, usually no more than ten persons. The bride's father too has invited only his nearest relatives to the wedding, for a widow marriage should not be celebrated with the same display as a *visah* wedding.

When the guests alight from their bullock carts, they are welcomed with Ram! Ram! All sit down, while the *nai* of the bride's village pours water into the hollow of the right hand of two men of the bridegroom's party. The men sip the water, gargle and spit it out. After that all get up and embrace each other with a certain formality. Then the guests and villagers chatting together proceed in groups to the *jamcasa*, a house prepared for the guests at some distance from the bride's home.

Before the entrance to the *jamcasa* a cloth is spread on the ground and the leading men of both parties are invited to sit down.

The bridegroom is seated on the place of honour but he is not permitted to take part in the conversation, he must remain silent throughout the negotiations. The spokesman of the bridegroom asks the *nai* to summon the village *panch*. The men come slowly one after the other and take their seats. The bridegroom's spokesman now pays about Rs. 20 to the *panch* and Rs. 4 to the *nai*. This fee to the *panch* is so high because the bride-price is comparatively high. The main task of the *panch* members is to witness the payment of the bride-price, the whole of which must now be paid (minus the amount paid at the time of the engagement). If the bridegroom cannot pay the entire sum in cash, the marriage is called off. It is only occasionally that the relatives of the bride agree to wait for the payment of the rest of the money till after the wedding, for they know well that if they do not receive the bride-price now they will in all probability never get paid at all. It often happens that if a rest is outstanding after the wedding has taken place the woman herself advises her new husband not to pay, because she is the sufferer if his wealth goes to her father's family.

While the bride-price is being paid, a meal is prepared at the home of the bride for the guests to which also the villagers are invited. The preparations for the dinner are often made only after the arrival of the wedding guests because it is never certain whether the party will arrive at all and how many will come. It is generally midnight before the meal is ready. But the Balahis do not mind such a delay, at any time of the day or night they are ready for a good meal!

After the dinner all return to the *janwasa* where they pass the time in animated entertainment, chatting, singing, and dancing. About an hour before day-break, the marriage is formally concluded. It must take place at such an early hour because the bridegroom should not be able to see his bride's face; to look at a widow's face at such a moment would be considered inauspicious. Also, the marriage must be concluded before the first crow of the cock, the sound of which during the ceremony would portend misfortune for all present at the wedding. Consequently the Balahis demand that the ceremonies be performed in the dark hours, before cock's crow, at the bride's house, under the *mandap* before the main door of the house.

As soon as the bride is dressed by a widow in her wedding garments which the bridegroom has presented, and adorned with all the ornaments which she had discarded at the death of her first husband, she is brought to the *mandap* where the wedding is to take place. The bride is accompanied by an old woman who too must be a widow. The *nai* brings a yoke (or the peg of a hand-loom) and

places it on the ground. The bridegroom steps at the side of the bride and both sit down on the piece of wood. A cloth (about 5 to 6 yards in length) is spread over the bridegroom's head and shoulders, and a similar cloth covers the bride. The *nai* ties a copper coin and a *supari* (areca nut) in the corner of each sheet and then knots the ends together. The old widow who has dressed the bride now approaches and paints the forehead of the couple with fresh cow-dung. The bridegroom gives a rupee to the old woman. Then the *nai* applies *kuku*, he gets four annas for it. Then the *sing* is blown, for which the player gets eight annas or, at the most, a rupee. With the blowing of the *sing* the marriage is concluded.

The newly-wed couple are told to get up. A bullock cart is made ready and two bullocks yoked. The bridegroom takes the hand of his bride and leads her to the cart. Both climb on the cart and are at once driven to the *kala* (threshing floor), accompanied only by the driver of the cart and by children. At the threshing floor the couple alight, the driver opens the knot by which bride and bridegroom are tied together and leads them into the *kala*. The two withdraw to a corner behind a hay-stack where they cannot be seen. Their companions sit down out of sight, and keep watch against any unbidden intruders while there and now the newly-wed pair consummate the marriage.

While all this takes place, the bride's father makes arrangements for a festive meal. A goat is killed and bottles of liquor are ordered from the shop. This time it is the bride's father who has to pay while the relatives of the bridegroom contribute only a small sum towards the expenses of the dinner. Before the guests sit down to the meal, they drink the liquor and this ceremony takes some time. If the preparations for the meal drag on, a glass of liquor is also sent to cheer the bridegroom who is with his new wife in the *kala*. As soon as dinner is announced, the bridegroom is called to take part in it. His wife, however, remains at the *kala* with her companions. She is no longer allowed to enter her parental house.

After the meal the wedding guests get ready to leave. It is usually about noon when the bullocks are yoked and the guests embrace their new relatives with Ram! Ram! The bride's father asks his *samdhi* for the date when it will be convenient to receive him. He is advised to come after a certain number of days, and receives two anna pieces as a souvenir. Then the bullock carts of the guests slowly proceed to the threshing floor where the bride is waiting. She takes leave of her relatives and embraces her nearest female relatives amidst loud wailing and crying. Then she climbs on the bullock cart and takes her place at the side of her new hus-

band. After a final leave-taking the bullock carts set off, with shouts of greetings and the mourning of the bride and her female relatives.

When the party approaches the village of the bridegroom, all the villagers assemble, eager to have a look at the bride. After the first greeting the woman is lead to the grain barn (*kothi*) in the main room of the house. She is made to reach with folded hands into the grain, while the relatives of her husband ask her: "*Kothi bhari hai ya riti hai?* (Is the barn full or empty?)." According to custom she has to reply: "*Bhari hai!*" even if the barn is empty! That is to show that the family is wealthy and has plenty of food.

The next morning the relatives of the husband touch with folded hands the feet of his new wife and then lead the couple to the village *patel*, and to other notables of the village and the caste. Both husband and wife touch the feet of the villagers to show their respect and receive small gifts. At least they are received with words of welcome, while the women talk to the bride touching her scarf or stroking her head.

After having paid their respect to the village people the two return home. The bride is requested by her mother-in-law to go and fetch water from the well. The woman lifts the *ghara*, a big brass or earthen pot, upon her head and takes a *lota* in her hand and, accompanied by the other women of the family, proceeds to the village well. When she returns with the full vessels to her new home, the other women bar her entrance into the house, till she tells them the name of her new husband. The water which she has brought from the well is used for cooking the next meal in the house.

#### (c) The Bride Returns to Her Parents (*baurha*)

During the week after the marriage the bridegroom's father makes arrangements for a big banquet to which up to twenty guests are expected from the village of the bride. When their arrival is announced, the villagers go to meet them outside the village. When the guests alight from the bullock-carts, they are embraced by the relatives of the bridegroom. Then all sit down and have a chat. After a while all proceed to the bridegroom's home where soon a splendid dinner is served for the guests. After the meal the guests soon retire, for it is generally late in the evening when they arrive.

The next morning the guests rise at day-break and make their toilet. Then the village *panch* is summoned to the house of the bridegroom. The bride's father or guardian is asked to pay two rupees to the *panch* and as much to the village *nai*. The sweeper, *kotwal*, and beggars are also tipped by the bride's father. After that a banquet is prepared for the guests to which the whole village

community is also invited. The meal is called *sirapuri* after the dish which is served on this occasion. *Sirapuri* is prepared of roasted cakes of wheat-flour which are crumbled and, mixed with the same quantity of *gur* and half as much of *ghi*, are again baked over the fire.

After the banquet guests and villagers sit around in loose groups and discuss the current affairs of their simple life. Then, early in the afternoon, the guests take leave of their hosts, saying: "The meal was excellent. We were pleased to see you. But now we think it is time for us to leave." The bride's father gives his *samdhi* (bridegroom's father) an *anna* as souvenir and embraces him with Ram! Ram! He embraces also his son-in-law and asks him: "When will you come for my daughter?" The man replies: "After a fortnight." Meanwhile also the bride takes leave of her mother-in-law and the other women of the house and the village, by touching their feet with folded hands. After that the bullocks are yoked and the guests depart with the bride who sits at the side of her father.

After about a fortnight the husband goes to fetch his wife. He usually takes a few relatives or friends with him on this visit. His father-in-law receives them well and, if his wealth permits it, presents his son-in-law with a new loin-cloth or turban. But the son-in-law too is expected to bring some presents for his new wife: a petticoat and a bodice, a scarf, bangles, and silver ornaments, possibly even a golden nose-ring.

The guests stay a few days at the home of the bride. When they take their leave, her husband touches the feet of his mother-in-law and of the other women in the house. Often he pays his respects also to other women in the village who give him and his wife small fare-well presents. At last he embraces his father-in-law and the other male relatives of his wife who meanwhile is crying on the breast of her mother, her sisters and sisters-in-law. After a while the bride is gently told to climb into the bullock-cart and to sit at the side of her husband, and off they go!

From this day the couple begin to live as man and wife and only rarely does the woman have the chance of seeing her former home.

## (2) Service for a Wife (*ghar jawai*)

If a man is poor, the arrangements for the marriage of his son will be put off time after time, until at last the son, on coming of age, requests his father to get him a bride without further delay. When the father finds that he cannot defer the marriage any longer, but on the other hand has no money to defray the wedding expenses, he may, as a last resort, call his brothers and other relatives and

lay the matter before them. He will disclose his financial difficulties and ask them for help. If the relatives are really convinced of the poverty of the boy's father, they usually promise a few rupees each as their contribution towards the wedding expenses. The Balahis consider that it is a meritorious act for relatives to pay the expenses of a poor boy's wedding. They call it a *dharm ka kam* (act of charity), all the more praiseworthy, because it is a voluntary contribution. However, the relatives will in such a case see to it that the marriage is arranged with the parents of a girl who themselves are too poor to afford an expensive marriage. In such a wedding, then, greatest economy will be observed, by curtailing especially the usual expensive banquets. Such a wedding will cost less than a hundred rupees.

If a boy who is anxious to get married finds no relatives willing to pay for his wedding, he sometimes may take service (*barsud*) with a landlord who agrees to advance him the necessary amount of money. It takes the boy a couple of years to work off his debt. But if no one is ready to take the risk of advancing so much money, the boy is obliged to offer himself to the father of a suitable girl as a servant (*ghar jawai*). Wealthy Balahis with no sons of their own are often glad to take a poor boy into the house to serve as a *ghar jawai* and later on to marry one of their daughters. The *ghar jawai*, after the death of his father-in-law, succeeds to the property which is his wife's share of inheritance. But for the time being, until he is actually married to the daughter of the house, he is a cheap and, on the whole, also a good servant, because he takes more interest in his work than a hired servant.

However, in the opinion of the Balahis as well as of other Hindus, this manner of securing a wife is not exactly the best possible way of getting married and is open to much abuse. In the first place, there are no fixed rules regulating the duration of service. A boy may have to serve anything from one year to ten before he can marry his bride-to-be. If the girl for whom he serves is very young at the time when he begins his *ghar jawai* he may have to wait a long time till he can marry her. But as long as the wedding has not formally taken place, he can never be quite sure that the contract will be honoured by the girl's father. It often happens that after some months of service he finds that the girl's father only wants a cheap and willing servant. While he is over-burdened with work, the food he gets is bad and unsufficient, he is badly treated by the members of the family, and perhaps also his bride-to-be does not come up to his expectations. Similarly the parents of the girl may find their future son-in-law lazy and altogether unsatisfactory; or they may have prospects for a better marriage. Any of these

reasons soon give rise to quarrels till the disagreement becomes so serious that the *ghar jawai* leaves the house. He has a right to compensation for his service, but this indemnity is sometimes withheld with the contention that the *ghar jawai* got more in food and clothing than his work deserved.

As long as the bride-to-be is immature, the *ghar jawai* is not allowed to become intimate with her; his sleeping quarters are separate from that of the family, either in a separate hut or at least in a room partitioned off from the sleeping room of the family.

The wedding of a *ghar jawai* to the daughter of the house is usually celebrated a short time before she reaches puberty. The rites of a *ghar jawai* marriage are the same as in a *vivah* or *natra pad* marriage, as the case may be. The wedding expenses are borne by the father of the bride who invites only the nearest relatives of the bridegroom for the marriage. No dinner is given to the caste fellows in the bridegroom's village.

The *ghar jawai* begins to live with his wife after she has reached maturity. If his father-in-law has no male heirs, he may stay on in the family and after his father-in-law's death inherit the property. Or else he may return to his native village and live with his wife in the house of his parents, or start a separate household.

### (3) Irregular Forms of Marriage

#### (a) Elopement

If a girl who is not sent to her husband soon after her first menstruation or a widow who for some reason or other is in no position to remarry falls in love with a man of her own village, she may elope with him to a distant village. The lovers go into hiding until the worst indignation of their relatives has subsided. The relatives of the woman will, however, make all possible efforts to recover her, because they do not want to lose the bride-price which is their due whenever a girl or woman of their family marries.

It is usually not difficult for the relatives of the eloped woman to find out her whereabouts, for the Balahis have an excellent news-service: on market days they meet fellow Balahis from many villages who pass on all the news of the whole district. As soon as the relatives know where the couple is hiding, they organise a rescue party. Friends and relatives, among them some men of good reputation and a gift of diplomacy, are invited by the father or guardian of the woman to join the party.

On their arrival at the village where the lovers have taken refuge, the pursuers first try to catch them. If they feel strong enough or if they know that the sympathy of the villagers is with

them, they may punish the abductor of the woman then and there and give him a severe beating, while they force the woman to return home. But if the guilty man has friends and relatives in the village, they may have to adopt a more diplomatic course of procedure. They must appeal to the village *panch* and demand the delivery of the woman. If the man who eloped with her is willing to pay a reasonably reduced bride-price, her relatives may after some bargaining even give their assent to their union. No elaborate wedding ceremonies are required in such a case: the man pays the bride-price and takes the woman of his choice home without much ado. But the Balahis of the village where he stays will not allow him to escape without giving them a dinner. And when after some time the two return to their native village, they will be fined by the *panch* of their own village and again have to give a banquet to the whole village.

Henceforth the couple may live peacefully in the village. Nevertheless there is a certain stigma attached to such a union, so that some Balahis may even go so far as to refuse to marry their daughters into such a family.

#### (b) Enforced Marriage

If a widow begets a child by a man whom she does not want to marry, she may try to bring about an abortion before her state becomes known. If the abortives applied fail and the villagers come to know that the woman is pregnant, she is obliged to inform the headman of the village *panch* of her condition. This is called *apna pet batlana* (to show the womb). The headman immediately summons the village *panch* before which the woman is asked to reveal the name of the man who has put her with child. If the woman reveals his name, the man is called to account. If he admits his guilt or is unable to prove his innocence, he is forced to take the woman as his wife. This may cause him much embarrassment, especially if he is already married. If he is still unmarried, it is easier to settle the matter. But if the woman refuses to reveal the name of her lover or incriminates an innocent man (whom she wants to marry), she is outcasted until she tells the truth. Usually the villagers know quite well who is really involved in the affair.

When the village *panch* has found out who is really responsible for the woman's pregnancy and has commanded him to marry her, he may take her to his house without any further ceremonies. He has only to pay a certain sum fixed by the *panch* to her relatives; and must give a banquet to the village community. But when the child is born, its mother is outcasted and her husband is obliged to pay for her rehabilitation. The expenses of the *sarni* ceremony, a banquet to the villagers, and the fee demanded by the *jat-patel* cost him a fair amount of money.

## (c) The Woman's Choice

If a widow wants to marry again, but her relatives put off her remarriage, she sometimes takes the matter into her own hands. Quite simply she goes one evening to the house of a man and informs him of her intention to stay with him. Generally this is no surprise to him, for there is often a secret understanding between the two. The woman's formal declaration that she wants to live with the man, is usually but the last stage of more or less intimate relations in the past. According to custom, the man even if he is unwilling to marry her cannot turn her out of his house. If he refuses to keep her, he must leave his own house to the woman and go to pass the night in the house of a friend or relative. If he keeps the woman for a single night in his house, it is considered that he has agreed to the marriage whether or no he has already a wife.

Next morning, the matter is certain to come to the notice of the villagers who summon the *panch*. The woman's relatives are naturally furious when they discover what has happened, because the woman has brought disgrace upon her family and deprived them of a high bride-price. They attempt to blame the man and accuse him of witchcraft or of using force or deceit. The woman is called before the *panch*. There she is asked by the headman whether she has entered the house of the man by her own free will or if she has been forced by any one. If the woman replies that she entered the house of the man because she wanted to marry him, the matter is settled and even her relatives cannot force her to give up the man of her choice if the latter is willing to marry her. He need not pay any bride-price to her relatives, but usually he agrees to pay a certain amount of money to get peace from the woman's indignant relatives. But he must give a dinner to the village community.

If the man refuses to marry the woman who stole into his house by night, he must prove that he was absent while the woman stayed in his house. The friend or relative in whose house he passed the night helps him to establish his alibi. In such a case the woman is obliged to return to her family. But her father or guardian will lose no time to make at once arrangements for her remarriage to prevent a recurrence of the incident. The woman now has no choice but must accept the husband whom her relatives provide for her whoever he might be.

## (4) Polygamy

According to Balahi tradition a man may have more than one lawful wife. Polygamy is regarded as a sign of wealth, for only a wealthy man can support more than one wife, unless he is a weaver.

Only on a fairly big farm is the keeping of two wives an economic asset, while the owner of a small field or a field labourer is scarcely in the position to support two wives. For several months of the year women find no employment on the farms and even in the sowing and harvesting season they are paid only half as much as the male field labourers. But in weaver families polygamy is profitable because a weaver continuously requires the helping hand of a woman to wind the yarn for the weft and the warp. In a monogamous family it may happen that a weaver has to stop work because his wife is sick or otherwise prevented from doing her work. This happens of course only to a weaver who does not live in a joint family.

Mainly for these economical reasons polygamy is rare among the Balahis, and occurs more frequently only among weavers and wealthy farmers. According to the Census of India (Central Provinces and Berar, Table VIII) 1931 the Nimar District counted 8738 male Balahis to 8753 females. That leaves only a surplus of 15 for polygamous marriages! No doubt, these figures are incorrect and much too low, but they nevertheless indicate that among the Balahis monogamy is the rule and polygamy the exception. Rarer still is it for a Balahi to have more than two wives. Such men do not enjoy a good reputation, for usually they keep a third or fourth wife only till they find a man who is ready to pay a good price for her. The Balahis do not approve of such transactions though the *panch* scarcely ever interferes.

The motive for taking a second wife is mainly to beget a son, if the first wife appears to be barren or only bears girls. For a Balahi the birth of a son is all-important, since it is the son who supports his parents in their old age and in infirmity, and who performs the funeral ceremonies on which depends the happiness of his parents in the other world. Therefore a woman who fails to bear a son not seldom herself advises her husband to take another wife and sometimes even goes so far as to select one herself, making sure that the woman suits her and at the same time gives fair promise of procuring the desired heir.

In a polygamous family the first wife remains mistress of the house, and the second wife is subject to her and generally has to do all the mean and heavy work in household and field. While socially the children of the first wife have preference over those of the second, the latter maintain the same status as far as rights of property and inheritance are concerned. At the death of the father all sons inherit an equal share whether they are of the first or of the second wife. And if the second wife alone gives birth to sons, they inherit the whole property, while the daughters of the first wife inherit nothing.

The husband of two wives has a claim to all that his wives earn and he may use their earnings at his own discretion. This naturally gives sometimes rise to jealousies, rivalries and quarrels among the women, especially if the husband prefers one woman to the other and makes her presents for which the other had to earn the money. If peace cannot be maintained in the house, the husband may permit his wives to live in separate quarters and even to cook and to work separately.

Only a woman who has once gone through the *vivah* marriage with another man can be taken as a second wife, for a second wife can only be married by *natra pad* rites. Consequently only a widow or a divorcee can be taken as a second wife, never a virgin girl. A Balahi has to pay a considerably higher bride-price for a second wife, for parents are generally reluctant to give their daughter to a man who is already married. The bride-to-be also usually needs much persuasion before she consents to such a marriage, for she knows well what she has to expect in a house where another woman is mistress.

The Balahis have a saying: It is hard enough to get along peacefully with one wife, but to live with two wives means continuous strife. And polygamous husbands often agree good-humouredly that there is some truth in this statement.

## Chapter XV

### Married Life

#### (1) Husband and Wife

Soon after the girl's first menstruation word is sent to her father-in-law that the girl is now ready to enter married life and that he may come to fetch her. The man soon arrives with a few companions at the girl's home. Custom demands that the guests arrive late in the evening and they are immediately served with a good meal of rice and goat's meat, with *gur* and *ghi* and a glass of *daru*. Soon after the meal the guests retire to bed. Early next morning they are up and prepare to leave with the girl. As dowry her father gives her a *lagra* or petticoat, a bodice, and a sheet in which to wrap all her belongings. He may also add to his presents some cooking pots, brass plates, a *lota*, silver ornaments, and if he is a man of wealth, even a cow or calf.

The daughter takes leave of her parents and other relatives. Each woman of the family embraces her, with wailing and loud mourning cries. Thus the whole village is informed of the girl's impending departure. Girl friends come and they too take their

leave of the parting girl who naturally feels very sad and cries bitterly. For she now realises that the happy carefree days of her childhood are over, that she is now about to leave her home and to enter into a new phase of life which will perhaps contrast unfavourably with her sheltered and pleasant home. While the women shed many tears during the leave-taking, the girl's male relatives show a more stoical composure. Even her father expresses scarcely any sign of sorrow and says little though he may feel his loss as keenly as the women. When his daughter touches his feet as a last greeting, he hurriedly strokes her head and says a few words of endearment.

The girl's father-in-law tries to cut short this highly emotional scene of leave-taking. He gently persuades the girl to climb into the bullock-cart and drives off as fast as possible, amidst general wailing and crying which continues long after their departure. After a while the wailing subsides, but all through the day whenever anything reminds the women of the girl, they begin their lamentations anew. Especially the mother of the girl feels very dejected. The departing girl cries so long as the village is in sight, then she stops her wailing and keeps silent during the whole journey.

On the young woman's arrival at her husband's village she is received by her mother-in-law and the other women of the family with friendly smiles and encouraging words. One woman after the other approaches and says a few words of welcome, gently pulling the girl by the scarf which covers her head and is drawn down over her face. Her husband, however, does not show his face until evening. A short while after her arrival the other women take the girl through the village to greet the caste fellows and to touch their feet with folded hands. The village people receive her kindly and give her small presents.

The arrival of the girl at her husband's house is called *ana* (the arrival).

That night she sleeps for the first time with her husband. For three nights the couple are made to sleep on the floor, probably to honour the Mother-Earth, whereby it is hoped to assure the fertility of the young woman. Usually a corner of the house is partitioned off by a mat or blanket to give the young couple some privacy, though the mother of the young man if she thinks it necessary may for the first night be present to tell them how to perform the marital act. Sometimes the girl is too shy and does not allow her husband to approach her, so that the kind persuasion of the mother-in-law is required. Or, as the Balahis put it, the mother attends the first mating of her son just to watch the fun.

From this first night until two months before the birth of their first child husband and wife sleep together every night. They must always sleep in their room, even in the hot season, when other people enjoy the cool night-air by sleeping out-of-doors. Only during the monthly period of the woman does her husband sleep separately. It is said that a newly-wed husband is suspected of infidelity or impotence if he abstains from sexual intercourse without serious reason for several nights. Slight sickness is no excuse for omittance of the marital act. A young Balahi woman generally minds less bad treatment by her husband or mother-in-law than frequent sickness or long absences of her husband. Balahi women maintain that the nights with their husbands are their only pleasures in a hard and dreary life, for, so they say, a woman has nothing else to think of, while a man may have many other interests and distractions.

But the main reason for the insistence on the regular performance of the sexual act is that the young couple should beget a child as soon as possible. Giving birth to a child is the greatest of honours and the first duty of a Balahi woman. The birth of a child is also the best proof that a woman is not sterile and the surest means to improve her position in the family and in particular her relations with her mother-in-law.

After the first child is born, the frequency of sexual intercourse may vary according to the will and wish of the married partners. Some couples have intercourse every night, others only several times a month. But many men complain that their wives would run away if they omitted intercourse for three consecutive nights. Sexual intercourse during menstruation, and about two months before and two months after, the birth of a child is prohibited. It is regarded as indecent to cohabit during the day, because there is always the chance of being surprised.

The married life of a Balahi couple is rarely the result of mutual love and liking. They scarcely know each other when they begin to live together. The marriage has been arranged by their relatives at an age when both, boy and girl, took little or no interest in the whole affair. But although neither has had a free choice of partners, they are now united for better or for worse, and as they gradually get to know each other, liking often blooms into love. For both are still young and pliable enough to be mutually influenced. That generally helps much towards a harmonious and peaceful married life. On the other hand, marriages without mutual attraction often lead to shipwreck, even in the first years of married life. But the Balahis make allowance for couples who cannot live in peace and permit them to separate.

Since marriages are arranged by the parents or guardians of a boy or girl, Balahi youths have no incentive for the artful sports of courtship. A young husband possesses his wife before he has time and opportunity to court her personal love and affection. At least at the beginning of married life, sexual intercourse is not the seal of a mutual bond of love, but just the satisfaction of the sex urge. It is said of the Balahis that they are clumsy in lovemaking: when man and woman meet, they do not care much for the refinements of approach to the sexual act, they immediately and directly aim at physical union.

In public a Balahi pretends that he has married his wife so as to have a cook or a field servant; custom forbids him to demonstrate his affection for his wife. A Balahi does not take any notice of his wife in the presence of strangers, he scarcely speaks to her. On a journey the wife walks a few steps behind her husband, carrying the luggage while he walks free. They do not talk to each other unless alone or in the presence of near relatives and near neighbours. A husband never touches his wife in the presence of others except to beat her. If he must mention his wife, he does not use her name, but speaks of the mother of his children, usually of the eldest son, or he calls her the 'woman of the house' (*ghar-wali*), or simply 'her'. It is likewise against Balahi etiquette to inquire about the health of a Balahi's wife. A visitor may ask about the children's health, or in general about the well-being of the family. If a man has to call his wife, he addresses his child or somebody else to convey his order to his wife, even if she is within earshot and understands every word.

However, after several years of married life this rule is frequently dispensed with. With the years women become more free and natural in conversation with their husbands or indeed with other men, with whom as young women they would not talk at all.

It would be wrong to conclude from these rules regulating the relations of husband and wife that Balahi women are always subservient to their husbands or are deprived of any will of their own. A clever woman knows well how to lead her husband without his becoming aware of it. Of course, she must observe carefully the rules which tradition, ancient custom, and deep-rooted convention demand of her. But within the limited range of a house-wife there remains enough scope for a clever woman to play her part and to influence the views and decisions of her husband and other male relatives in all spheres of their life. On the other hand, the master of the house is often deterred from ill-treating and bullying his wife, for fear lest her relatives take revenge or even take her away.

Although it is customary among the Balahis to speak disdainfully of women in general, it is not rare to hear a man praise the good qualities of his wife and to compare her favourably with other women. Such conversation is indeed only permitted to men of advanced age or among friends.

In a Balahi household the husband is supposed to be the head of the family. But this he is only if his father and elder brothers are dead or if he maintains a separate household. If he lives with his family he has little to say, and his wife has still less.

## (2) Relations between a Woman and her Husband's Relatives

The position of a woman in her husband's family is clearly defined. Her attitude towards her father-in-law should be that of reverence and respect; she must always keep distance from him. She is not permitted to be alone with him in the house. Her father-in-law is not allowed to touch her, much less to beat her. A Balahi who beats his daughter-in-law is expelled from the caste by the village council. The same rules govern the relations of a man and his mother-in-law. The motive behind such regulation is obviously the intention to exclude any intimacy between father-in-law and the wives of his sons, or mother-in-law and the husbands of her daughters. The danger of such intimacy is real enough and cases are known of fathers-in-law who demanded sexual intercourse with the wives of their sons. The sons could not prevent their father from sleeping with their wives till they left their father's house. Sometimes it is the widowed mother-in-law who, having the husband of one of her daughters living at her house, wants her daughter to share him with her. Such cases occur though they are not frequent and are liable to be punished by the caste council if they can be proved by witnesses. While village gossip may relate many such cases, it is difficult to prove anything. People therefore who are not afraid of the gossip of their fellow villagers may misbehave frequently in such a way without punishment.

A woman must observe the same conventions in her relations with her husband's elder brothers. But while the elder brother of a woman's husband is to her like a father-in-law, and they could never marry even after the husband's death, a woman's relations with the younger brothers of her husband are not subject to the same restrictions. A younger brother may talk to her freely and can even beat her when her husband is not there to punish her himself. It is said that younger brothers, particularly as long as they are unmarried, not infrequently take liberties with their sisters-

in-law. In the absence of her husband, or at work in the fields or on journeys, there is ample opportunity for such behaviour. For custom permits a woman to be alone with her brother-in-law at any place. Among other castes a younger brother of her husband may take her in marriage after her husband's death, perhaps a relic of the time when a younger brother had access to the wives of his elder brothers, a custom still prevalent among certain tribes in India. Though this practice is not, or no more, permissible among the Balahis, a certain laxity of conduct is still perceptible between young men and their elder brothers' wives.

Instances are known of intimate relations between a woman and her husband's younger brother. In a village near Khandwa a Balahi lived for a long time with the wife of his elder brother who was absent, working in a distant village. When a child was born, it was considered to be the child of the elder brother from his lawful wife, but the younger brother adopted it and paid for its education.

In another village a Balahi grew so fond of his brother's wife that he eloped with her. This was, of course, not tolerated by his caste fellows who put the couple out of the caste. But the man defied the decisions of the *panch* and is still living with the wife of his brother. The Balahis of the village where he now lives have already begun to treat the matter as an accomplished fact and to associate once more with the outcast.

A young woman's relations with her mother-in-law deserves special consideration. The mother-in-law is supposed to act as a loving mother to her. She must teach her all the duties she has to perform in and about the house. Of course, the young woman has already had some training from her own mother, but every woman has her own ways and the young daughter-in-law has to adjust herself to her new surroundings. Frequently a mother-in-law complains that now-a-days girls do not learn anything at home, and do not even know how to cook a decent meal. And a daughter-in-law complains that no matter how much she exerts herself her mother-in-law will never give her a kind word. The proverbial strained relations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law prevail also among the Balahis. A daughter-in-law not seldom revenges herself by spoiling a meal on purpose or by spiteful disobedience or by pretended ignorance or inability. Passive resistance is not a new invention of Gandhi, it has long since been practiced by the humble and dejected young women whose mothers-in-law do nothing but nag and scold. A mother-in-law is free to talk to her son's wife, to order her about and even to beat her.

A Balahi woman is, generally, glad to have a daughter-in-law in the house. For now it is the young woman who does all the mean

and hard work of the household. Even if the demands on her are very heavy, the young wife is not supposed to complain or to answer back, often enough she has to work like a slave, without a cheerful and encouraging word from her mistress. It may well be that the young woman has been pampered by her own mother and does not know how to cook properly, and then a mother-in-law has indeed some excuse to scold her. But often the reason why a daughter-in-law does not put her whole mind on her duties is that she does not yet feel at home in her husband's house and is homesick for her own home. She feels lonely and sad and all her thoughts dwell on the happiness and affection to which she has been accustomed at home.

Once a young woman complained to me of her mother-in-law's bad treatment. I asked her how she would behave towards her own daughters-in-law some twenty years hence. The young woman smiled and replied: "I think I will be worse than my mother-in-law and will repay with interest to my daughters-in-law what I get today from my own!"

In cases where a husband's mother is dead, and there is no elder sister-in-law to replace her, a young wife is spared at least the endless nagging and scolding of an elder woman. However, her life may not be much the easier for it, since she must then do all the house-work, and is alone responsible for the cooking, cleaning, fetching water from the well and washing after a day's heavy work in the fields.

Often enough a young husband lends an ear to complaints about his wife's clumsiness or stubbornness and, dependent as he is upon his relatives, and often elated by his power over his wife he is not slow to give her a sound scolding or even a severe beating.

The young woman is not allowed to talk with any man except her own near relatives. This rule must be strictly observed during the first year of her married life. For if she is seen talking to a young man, whether of the village or from outside, she is certain to get a beating from her husband. After several years of married life her husband may be more lenient in this respect, but the rule is strictly enforced until the birth of her first child, lest a too familiar acquaintance with an other man result in an elopement.

The early years of married life often leave an unhappy imprint on the young woman's character. For at this time she is still very young (about fourteen), while her husband is at least several years her senior. Often she suffers under his too passionate affection and sometimes grows to find him repulsive. Although such cases are said to be quite frequent, the Balahis are on the whole convinced that an early marriage is the only feasible thing under the prevailing

circumstances. For their social and economic conditions do not allow them to keep a girl at home long after her coming of age. Poverty obliges them to send every capable hand to work in their own fields or in the houses of their employers and from this adolescent girls are not exempted. Thus at home they are exposed to many temptations while in the house of a husband they can be better taken care of, where if anything untoward happens it may be hushed up, whereas if an unmarried girl has a baby outside of wedlock she is expelled from the caste and never taken back.

Two or three months after the *ana*, the beginning of married life, the young woman is visited by her father or elder brother. He comes to take her home for a few days. The main reason of his visit is to find out how his daughter (or sister) is treated at her new home. At home she candidly tells her parents, or her sister or sister-in-law how she fares with her husband and his relatives. She will speak too of her sex relations with her husband in an indirect way. If her husband is indifferent to her and does not sleep with her as often as she wants him, she may for instance say: "*Mokha khali adho roto milyo. Adho roto se haun dabgayo!* — I only get half a bread; I fall short of the other half!"

When her husband comes to take her home, the elder sister or a sister-in-law of his wife (never her mother!) has a private talk with the young man. She says perhaps: "We have given you a field, well ploughed and prepared for sowing. Could you not sow at least five grains on it?" by which she means to say that the young husband has not been fervent enough in response to his wife's affections. But if he has been too passionate and his wife would have more moderation, she will say to him: "You have got everything in your house: rice, *dal*, *joari*, in plenty. Why do you want to eat four pounds of rice at one meal, if two pounds are sufficient to fill the stomach?" The young man will understand what his wife's agent wants to tell him in this veiled form and if he is witty enough he will endeavour to excuse himself with similarly disguised allusions.

Frequently the young woman complains of overwork and of bad treatment either by her mother-in-law or by her husband. If her complaints are serious, her parents will keep her at home under some pretext for which the Balahis are never wanting. Her husband will be obliged to come for her several times before they allow her to go with him and then not without a friendly warning. A divorce, however, will only be demanded after repeated complaints of their daughter.

Generally, after initial difficulties, the young couple get on quite well, and gradually husband and wife get used to each other's

ways and habits and not seldom also mutual love and esteem springs up between the two. And often enough the woman becomes the real mistress of the house. In every village one can find some Balahi women who are well able to take care of themselves, to manage a big household and to rule their husbands. And quite many Balahis admit frankly and good-humouredly that they have little to say in their own home. Poverty does not allow the Balahi women to stay at home, it forces them out of the house, into the open air, to work outside the narrow circle of the home, freely mixing with other people and this freedom gives them a broader mental outlook and also greater physical health than high-caste women.

Among the Balahis it is the woman who is most conservative and observes the old caste rules and regulations to the letter. The men are more indifferent in these matters and are often inclined to laxity, but the women insist on observing the regular fasts and feasts and the performance of the prescribed offerings and sacrifices; they watch over the correct observance of the ritual at weddings and other important feasts. Many Balahi women are sincerely religious-minded and are keen on making a pilgrimage to some famous shrine where they pray for family and house, while the men frequent such places more to feast or to buy bullocks.

### (3) Divorce

Divorce, like marriage, is subject to the control of the village *panch*, and usually requires the approval of the husband's as well as the wife's family.

Divorce action may be introduced by either party, and it is rather frequent, so frequent in fact that for this reason the Balahis have a bad reputation among the Hindu castes. Usually it is the woman's relatives who seek a divorce because of ill-treatment, dissatisfaction of the woman, or the prospect of a good bride-price in case of a remarriage. The divorce takes effect from the moment the bride-price is returned, either totally or in part.

#### (a) The Dissolution of a Betrothal

A betrothal may be broken for various reasons, such as difficulties in the family, prospects of a better marriage, quarrels between the families of the betrothed, and many other reasons. The betrothal ceases automatically if the boy's father fails to send clothes for the girl thrice a year.

When a betrothal is dissolved, all valuable presents that have already changed hands are returned by both sides. Quite often, how-

ever, they cannot be returned as they have already been disposed of, sold, or given away.

The actual dissolution of a betrothal is, of course, no affair of the betrothed themselves, but rests entirely with their parents or guardians.

#### (b) The Dissolution of a Marriage

During the time between the wedding and the consummation of the marriage, between *barat* and *ana*, according to good Balahi custom no marriage can be dissolved. Only after the consummation of the marriage is a divorce possible. It is usual for a man when he gets tired of his wife to send her back to her parents. If he fails to come for her, her parents know that something is wrong. So they send word to their son-in-law to fetch his wife, at the same time threatening him that they are going to remarry her to somebody else if he should tarry. If the husband really does not want his wife back, he will try to get at least a compensation for the bride-price he has paid. The compensation must be paid by the parents before they can accept the bride-price from their daughter's new husband.

At times a husband gets rid of his wife by selling her to another man. With his connivance the purchaser will carry the woman off, even if he has to use force against her. But the woman's parents will protest against such a transaction and try to get her back unless their daughter consents to stay with her new husband. In such a case the matter is soon settled. The new husband pays a few rupees to her parents and gives a banquet to the villagers. No further wedding ceremonies are required. But if the new husband is a Mohammedan, the woman is usually lost, as few Balahis dare to sue a Mohammedan. But if he happens to be a man of a lower caste, the woman may be recovered but having lost her caste by living with him, her parents will have to pay heavily for her reconciliation. If possible, a woman cuts short all disputes and negotiations by running away from the man who is keeping her against her will. She tries to return to her parents who will soon find another husband for her, whom she then marries according to *natra pad* rites.

The negotiations for a divorce, called *jagra torna*, i.e. to settle a quarrel, are usually conducted by half-professional 'divorce judges'. Such men are invited to give their assistance and advice to the peaceful settlement of such quarrels. Having vast experience in handling such cases, they generally succeed in settling the case to the satisfaction of both parties as well as to their own advantage, for they have to be paid well for their service.

The Balahis claim that in former times a divorce was a rare event, but at present it is certainly a frequent occurrence. Instances which show that the marriage bond is not held so sacred among the Balahis as among other Hindu castes are frequent. A few may be given here.

At a village near Pandhana a Balahi had lost his wife through death. Looking about for another wife, he eventually fixed his attention on a woman who was already married. But this fact did not prevent him from making advances to the woman who at last consented to marry him. The woman soon found a reason to quarrel with her husband, and then to quarrel again and again. At last what she and her lover wanted, happened: the exasperated husband wanted a divorce. As soon as the woman was free, her ardent wooer married her, paying a hundred and twenty-five rupees for her. To get ready cash for the bride-price, he sold the corrugated iron sheets of his house roof at half their cost price. Was he happy? — Well, already after a few weeks the man got tired of his new wife. Without much ado he came to an agreement with another Balahi at another village and handed her over to him for Rs. 25. Now he is without a wife and without a roof over his head!

In another case that came to my knowledge a young Balahi had a quarrel with his wife. In his rage he took a solemn oath henceforth to treat her as if she were his mother or sister. The young woman who hotly disapproved of such treatment soon ran away to her parents. After some time, when his anger had cooled down a bit, the husband made attempts to get his wife back. When he came to his wife's parents to claim her, they called the village *panch*. Before the assembled village council the woman accosted her husband and said: "I wonder why you have come. You have sworn to treat me as if I were your mother or sister! I refuse to go with you. I do not want to live with such a man!" The villagers were at the beginning inclined to sympathise with the woman, but they took the part of her husband when he declared: "You are my wife. A woman has no right to argue with her husband. Stop talking and come with me!" This incisive reply found the hearty approval of the village council, and the woman was forced to return with her husband without being allowed any further comments.

Sometimes it is the wife who wants a divorce. The procedure in such a case is the following: If a girl wants a separation from her husband, she either runs away from him or refuses to return to him when on a visit with her parents. Her parents refuse to send her along when her husband comes to fetch her home. Under some flimsy pretexts they will ask for an extension of their daughter's visit. After some days, the husband or a near relative of his comes

a second and even a third time to fetch the young woman home. If the parents still refuse to send the girl her husband will inform his relatives of his troubles to get his wife back. Now the father or elder brother of the young husband asks four or six men, his relatives or friends, to accompany him to the girl's home village. On their arrival they are usually well received by the girl's family. But as soon as they suggest that the young woman should return to her husband, her parents begin to complain of her ill-treatment and refuse to send her back. If they cannot be persuaded to let their daughter go to her husband's house, the men summon the village council. The difficulties of the young woman are explained whereupon the husband's party will try to refute her charges or blame her. Such a dispute may drag on for a long time. At last the girl's father says: "I am ready to send my daughter if you are willing to watch over her and to guarantee that she is well treated. But if I hear of any further complaints I shall take my daughter home and marry her to some other man." The men who came to plead for the woman's return to her husband promise to look after her well-being and declare that they guarantee for her husband's good behaviour. The father of the girl then commands his daughter to return to her husband's house. According to Balahi law, she must obey without objection, even if she is determined to get a divorce. It is in order to save her father any embarrassment that she obeys, but if things do not improve she will run away again as soon as she gets a chance.

If this happens two or three times, and it becomes increasingly difficult for him to persuade her parents to send her back, her husband will finally tire of her. At last, he himself will suggest a divorce on condition that the bride-price be restored to him. The village council will settle this question and fix the sum to be repaid. It goes without saying that all presents of the man to his wife must also be returned.

A divorced woman is allowed to remarry, but only according to *naira pad* rites. A divorced man is, however, free to marry a virgin girl (by *vivah* rites), a widow, or a divorcee.

Not infrequently it is the parents who try to dissolve the marriage of their daughters on the pretext of ill-treatment, but in reality because they covet a second bride-price. They hope that they will have to return only part of the first husband's bride-price whereas they hope to receive a substantial sum from a second marriage.

In a village not far from Khandwa a newly wed couple had settled down. According to Balahi custom, the young wife went on a short visit to her parents during the Holi festival. It happened that the girl's parents were in urgent need of a certain sum of money

when their daughter arrived. So they took this opportunity and simply sold the girl to another man who was willing to pay a good price for her. The poor husband of the girl tried his best to get her back, but without success. Four years passed. The woman meanwhile became the mother of two children by her second husband. But her first husband had not forgotten her and one day, when her second husband was absent, he surprised her and, with the help of some friends, carried her off to his own village. He did not forget to take with him all her silver ornaments valued at more than a hundred rupees. A report was made to the police, but to no avail. At present the woman is living with her first husband.

Here is another case: At a certain village near Pandhana the parents refused to send their daughter back to her husband. The latter went home and fetched about thirty companions to take away his wife by force. They besieged the house of the girl's parents for some time. But the father of the girl successfully prevented the men from entering his house, and they were reluctant to force their way into the house because house-breaking is punished severely by law. The young woman's husband could not persuade them to use force so he decided at last to change his tactics. He invited his companions to a liquor-shop and treated them liberally with liquor to rouse their courage to more decisive action. After the seventh bottle the men were burning for immediate action. They returned to the barricaded house and began to break it open. But at that moment it just happened that a police head-constable arrived at the other corner of the village. When the house-breakers heard of his arrival, they took to flight and sneaked away through the alleys and field-paths of the village.

The same night the parents sent their daughter to a distant village and had her married to another man who offered twenty rupees for her. This happened in May 1940.

After a divorce, as in the case of a widow after the death of her husband, the woman returns to the clan of her parents.

A woman cannot on her own demand a divorce from her husband. This matter must be handled by her relatives. If they refuse, or if she has no influential relatives, she is helpless, unless she resorts to a deed of despair and tries to get rid of her husband by using poison. In a village of about fifty Balahi families I heard within five years of three cases of young women who tried to poison their husbands. In each case the poison was supplied by the village midwife. In one case, a newly married girl mixed poison into the *dal* of her husband's and his sister's dinner. Both became delirious for several days, but after some time recovered again. In the second case, the husband fell violently sick after dinner, but after taking

an emetic soon got better. In the third case, a woman was persuaded by a man whom she loved to poison her husband. She secured the poison from the midwife and poured a generous dose of it into the tea which her husband was about to take. But he, growing suspicious on account of the peculiar taste and smell, did not drink it but gave it to his dog which died shortly afterwards. In all three cases the families refrained from making a report to the police although the women admitted their crime when questioned by their husbands. The women were forgiven, and none was dismissed by her husband. Slowly the young women got accustomed to their new homes and are now living peacefully with their husbands. The Balahis indeed easily excuse a woman's misbehaviour, thinking none too highly of their intelligence. They use to say: "What does a woman know? She does not understand anything. She must be treated with kindness, patience, and occasionally with a sound beating."

But there is no doubt that the Balahis greatly underrate their women's intelligence and responsibility for their actions. If within five years three cases of poisoning are found out in a rather small village community, the suspicion is not unfounded that other such crimes were committed which were not brought to light and in which the women were successful.

This is not improbable in a country where a doctor hardly ever examines the cause of death, and where the body is interred a few hours after death. Besides, the Balahis say themselves that they know quite a few 'medicines' which give quick results without leaving any suspicious symptoms. And in every village there is generally one or the other woman who for a small remuneration is willing to provide the desired drug.

But as a rule such violent means of getting rid of an unwanted husband (or wife!) are not even necessary. Health conditions in the Nimar District are such that in the course of the year most people fall sick at one time or other. Wilful carelessness and deliberate neglect can be as fatal in effect as the most deadly poison, and without arousing the least suspicion. On more than one occasion I suspected intentional and deliberate neglect when I saw a patient being treated against my express prescriptions. Sometimes the patient is simply starved to death or fed with a type of diet which the relatives know to be harmful for the patient.

## Chapter XVI

### Disease and its Cures

A complete and exact survey of the health conditions of the Balahis is practically impossible for lack of precise statistics. The official Health Registers (which are kept in every village by the

*patel* or *kotwal*) record as the cause of death in nine out of ten cases: fever. The Balahis, ignorant of the immense variety of human ailments, rarely recognise the real nature of a disease and attribute death to fever as the most common symptom of any disease. Many infirmities for which they have no natural explanation they attribute to evil spirits or to the wrath of certain gods or *matas* who have to be appeased by sacrifices and offerings or exorcised by magical practices.

The Balahis are very sensitive to a slight indisposition and are apt to complain whenever they feel unwell. Even a slight pain is sufficient as an excuse from work and to make them stay at home. The Balahis seem to consider that an indisposition can be easily cured by a day of complete rest combined with a long sleep. But if this rest-cure does not help and if the pains increase, they begin to complain, to groan and moan, and to invoke the help of the gods. The Balahi's behaviour in illness varies of course according to the individual character of a patient: some suffer stoically and without a word of complaint, but as a rule they display little patience or self-control when in pain. They get restless, and want this and that, above all they want attention and sympathy. If the disease takes a serious turn, the relatives are anxious to fulfil every wish and whim, for they fear that the sick will take revenge after death for any negligence.

To humour a patient his relatives will prepare his favourite dishes, and in procuring these they will often go a long way to oblige him, even if it means borrowing money to fulfil an extravagant wish. His requests are fulfilled even if they are obviously detrimental to the recovery of the patient: relations often lack the necessary firmness of mind to refuse a patient what might be harmful to him, if he asks for it.

The ordinary sick-diet is rice water or *suji* (wheat which is prepared by moistening the grain and grinding it in a stone pricked with minute holes). A pudding of wheat flour is another dish for a patient who begins to feel his appetite returning. The wheat-grain is ground roughly and boiled in water and sweetened with sugar. It is called *rabri*. A very popular dish in sickness is boiled chicken. The Balahis say that chicken-meat works wonders in the stomach of a sick man, especially when taken with a glass of *daru*. Eggs too are much in demand though they are not easily obtained.

If a patient does not soon show signs of recovery, he is likely to be neglected by his relatives. They get tired of nursing, disregard his complaints till he gets worse and his infirmity enters into a critical stage. Only then they seem to be roused from their indifference and again try to do all in their power for the patient's relief.

Only the nearest relatives will nurse a sick Balahi. A stranger, even if he belongs to the same caste, is left alone with equanimity. It therefore often happens that a sick person succumbs, for want of proper care and nursing, to a relatively slight illness. Single persons without relatives may lie for days helpless and alone in their hut, not even a glass of water is brought to them. And when strength fails them to clean themselves after a call of nature, nobody goes near them anymore.

In a village near Khandwa a woman, mother of three small children, who had been deserted by her husband, got sick with pneumonia. Her eldest boy, about six years of age, did what he could to nurse his mother, but, after the manner of children, he was more intent on playing with the other boys of the village than on looking after her. The sick woman who had no relatives of her own in the village was completely neglected by the relatives of her absent husband. When the children were hungry they went off to beg a piece of bread from neighbours, but the poor deserted woman got nothing to eat though her eldest boy now and then fetched a glass of water for her to drink. When she lost consciousness, the boy forgot even to moisten her fever-parched lips. After five days the woman died, more from want of food and care than because of her sickness.

In the same village there stayed some years ago a family of Katia Balahis who were accustomed to come there for work every year at the beginning of the monsoon. They had built a small hut near the Balahi quarters where they lived with their three small children. One day, both husband and wife went down with malaria. Though they lived close to the Balahi quarters, not one of the Nimar Balahis troubled to look after them. Knowing that the Katia Balahis would not even accept a glass of water from a Nimar Balahi, nobody entered their hut or enquired about the needs of the sick couple. After a few days the village *patel* happened to pass the hut of the Katias. When he was informed that the inmates of the hut had not been seen for several days, he opened the door and to his horror found that both man and woman were dead. Their children were playing near the bodies of their parents, blissfully ignorant of the calamity that had befallen them.

In times of epidemic the whole population leaves the village and moves out into the jungle, thinking that their only hope of survival lies in flight. They abandon all who are infected even if it be their nearest and dearest relatives.

When a Balahi falls sick, he first resorts to the usual household medicines of which there is no lack and in which they have much faith. Friends and relatives lend their advice and it is believed that no harm will be done if the patient takes several medicines at the

same time, for if one does not help the other may, and among many remedies a patient is bound to hit upon the right one. When the patient recovers everybody is convinced that it was just his medicine that effected the cure. In addition to the medicaments offered by well-meaning friends and neighbours, a quack doctor is sometimes called in to treat the sick. In almost every village there is a man or woman who is reputed to have a knowledge of herbs and healing potions and indeed they are sometimes effective. When these ordinary remedies fail to cure a patient, the *barica* (magician) is called.

The Balahis are not yet accustomed to medical treatment by a trained doctor. They generally fight shy of doctors and hospitals, not so much for pecuniary reasons as from superstition. They are particularly averse from undergoing an operation and often prefer certain death, excusing themselves by saying that when they die they would not like to appear before Bhagwan with a body mutilated by the surgeon's knife or sewn together like a gunny-bag. However, in recent years, the Balahis have learned to appreciate the effectiveness of modern medicine. They are especially fond of injections and will cheerfully pay a heavy price for any medicine provided it is administered by injection. But they also expect immediate relief, and feel much disappointed if they do not recover at once. Given proper medical care it is indeed marvellous how well the organism of these people reacts, and they often recover in an incredibly short time from the most desperate illness.

### Epidemics and Infectious Diseases

Almost every year one disease or another appears in epidemic form in the Nimar District and takes a heavy toll of human lives. In one year it may be cholera, as it was in 1939, in another year influenza, or malignant malaria.

Such an epidemic usually starts in the slums and outskirts of the towns and villages where the low caste people live. The undernourished organism of these people offers little resistance to diseases; their quarters lie mostly outside the villages close to the tract set aside as a village latrine whence germs are carried into their quarters by dogs and rats, the scavengers of the Indian villages, or by the dust which, especially in the hot season, sweeps before a high wind over the leaky huts. The wells of the low caste people too are often situated in dirty and unhealthy places, open to filth and contamination. People bathe near the well and wash their clothes so close to the rim that the dirty water flows back into the well. In the hot season, even the wells dry up and the people are obliged to fetch drinking water from a small rivulet or pond in which other

people are accustomed to bathe or to clean themselves after a call of nature and where cattle and other animals slake their thirst.

Epidemics usually start towards the end of the dry season and in the beginning of the monsoon, when grain is scarce and the Balahis as well as other low-caste people eat a great deal of unripe and rotten fruit, when cattle die in large numbers and carrion is consequently eaten in plenty. At this time of the year field-servants and occasional labourers find no employment, or work for starvation wages which scarcely allow them one full meal a day. They are forced therefore to complement their meagre diet by anything that is edible. All this weakens the physical constitution of the people, and the heat and humidity of the climate at this time of the year greatly increases the virulence of germs.

The Balahis, therefore, and the other castes who live socially and economically under much the same conditions, are a potential danger to the health of the entire population of the country.

### Cholera

Cholera, when it appears, is most prevalent in the hot season immediately preceding the monsoon. It usually subsides a little after the beginning of the rains, but reaches another climax in November after which it gradually falls.

The Balahis are helpless when in the grip of this disease. They say that there is no effective medicine against cholera and know of no means to protect themselves against it. They frequently abandon their villages leaving the sick to their fate and scatter in the fields or jungle till the disease subsides. But ignorant of the true nature of infection, they expose themselves to contagion by taking with them in their flight the already infected household utensils, clothes, blankets, etc.

The Balahis, as also the other Hindus, believe that this disease is sent by a dreadful goddess, *Mari Mata*, or *Haiza*. In their opinion there is only one way of escaping death from this disease: a propitiatory offering to the 'Great Mother'. If the goddess accepts the offering, the patient infected by the disease will recover. The application of natural remedies against this disease is actually discouraged by the Balahis, in the conviction that a disease caused by supernatural powers cannot be cured by natural means. The very attempt to do so will only increase the wrath of the goddess. However, there are Balahis who are not quite as passive before the danger of cholera and use a medicine which when the attack is slight is often effective: this is a tea of *hing* (*Ferula asafoetida*), mixed with the ashes of burned onions.

Nowadays, when cholera appears in epidemic form, touring doctors go around in the district and inoculate people against the disease. But the villagers, especially the Balahis, are still much averse to such inoculations. In 1939 when cholera was particularly severe in Nimar, I was in a Balahi village. When I heard that in a neighbouring village several persons had caught the disease, I requested a doctor to come and to inoculate the entire population of the village in which I was staying. But not even after I had offered my arm first for the needle could a courageous Balahi be found to follow my example. It took almost a day to get 250 persons inoculated. On the next day I was nearly lynched! Almost all those (myself included) who had been inoculated went down with fever (for I had asked the doctor to give us a full dose instead of the usual half dose, which is not sufficient in case of infection). It was most difficult to re-assure them of the harmlessness of this strange fever.

### Smallpox

Before compulsory vaccination was introduced in the district, smallpox was a most terrible scourge in the country. And even today many persons are found whose pock-marked faces bear witness to their sufferings. Smallpox as such is by the Balahis hardly looked on as natural disease, but is regarded by them, and by most villagers of Northern India, as a visitation of the goddess *Sitala Mata*. Therefore no proper medicine is applied, only water in which sacred *nim* leaves (*Melia azadirachta*) have been soaked.

Since the introduction of compulsory vaccination the disease has lost its former virulence and much decreased in frequency, but though the benefits of vaccination are obvious many Balahis still try to evade vaccination. They complain that frequently babies get sick after vaccination and even die. It appears that their complaints are not quite baseless whatever may be the reason.

### Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is a disease extremely common among Balahis. It appears usually in the form of phthisis, but also often as tuberculosis of the glands, of the bowels, or of the bones. The habits of the Balahis, their custom of continuing to live together with diseased members of the family, undernourishment and physical weakness, ignorance about the nature of the disease and its treatment, the lack of doctors and medicines, all this makes the Balahis a veritable hot-bed for TB. bacilli. In every village one can find Balahis whose emaciated bodies, incessant coughing and spitting, general weakness, etc., are unmistakable signs of consumption. There is a great deal of

hidden or unsuspected tuberculosis in the Balahi quarters, a relatively large number of children are found with tuberculosis of the glands, particularly the glands of the throat.

The Balahis do not even know that such a disease exists. They believe that consumption is just a fever combined with pains in the chest and a chronic cough. They try to get relief by applying the usual remedies which they have against fever or a cold. Tubercular sores are treated like ordinary ulcers or boils. They are much astonished if such sores do not heal quickly. A temporary improvement makes them believe in a complete cure.

### Venereal Diseases

Syphilis appears to be endemic among the Balahis; many suffer from it, though it seems that the Balahis are to some extent immune to the acute forms. Balahis are rarely found suffering from the worst features of the late stage of syphilis. Since so many Balahis are infected, the disease is easily transmitted from husband to wife, or from wife to husband and children. The Balahis have also the habit of borrowing one another's clothes; sometimes worn clothes are presented to them by their employers; some Balahi clans have also the traditional right of appropriating the clothes of a corpse which are thrown away at the funeral.

Many Balahis are, at one time or other, afflicted with gonorrhoea. Unlike syphilis which is endemic, the Balahis usually admit that they contract this disease by sexual intercourse outside marriage. Young men suffer from it particularly often, either infected by prostitutes, or by their own wives who may have caught it from Mohammedans among whom this disease appears to be wide-spread.

Balahis often pretend that they are not aware of the true nature of venereal diseases and maintain that such afflictions are the result of eating meals too heavily spiced. They feel no shame in admitting that they are suffering from it and readily appear for treatment. They already know the effectiveness of mercury injections though they often find them too expensive. They apply sulphur lotions as a remedy, or buy the many quack medicines which are sold by hawkers who specialise in such remedies. The aboriginal Gonds and Korkus of the district are also said to know quite effective medicines for syphilis and gonorrhoea, though these seem to give but temporary relief.

### Leprosy

According to the Census of India 1931 there were in the Nimar District, per 100,000 of the population, 48 male and 21 female lepers<sup>55</sup>).

<sup>55</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, page 219. Nagpur 1933.

The number of lepers in the Nimar is certainly much higher than recorded in the Census and I should say that among the Balahis the percentage of lepers is highest. Here this disease is often called the 'Balahi disease'. Leprosy is endemic in certain families, lepers being found among them generation after generation; the disease seems however to be confined to certain villages, for in many villages there is not a single leper, while a few have a disproportionately high number afflicted. The village with the highest number of Balahi lepers in the Nimar District is Sirsud, about ten miles west of Khandwa. In this village not only the Balahis but also other castes suffer from leprosy. Among the several thousand Balahis whom I have met, I found more than 20 lepers among whom were only three women. It is safe to assume that among a thousand Balahis at least three are lepers.

The Balahis regard a leper as unclean and avoid his touch once the marks of the disease become clearly visible. As long as the disease is in its initial stage, the Balahis are indifferent as far as ordinary social contacts are concerned. It would seem that the Balahis' motive for segregating lepers is not so much fear of infection, as horror before a man or woman marked by this disease. A leper may have the infectious type of leprosy, but the diseased man remains in intimate contact with his family, and can even continue to live with his wife. He may be obliged to eat separately, using his own plates and pots, but as long as the marks of the disease are not conspicuous, no strict seclusion is demanded by either family or village community. On the other hand, in the advanced stage of leprosy, though it may be of the non-infectious type, the patient is often obliged to leave his house and home and to live in a separate hut. However, the members of the immediate family rarely break completely with even the worst type of leper unless too poor to support him. Without such support a leper is obliged to earn his living by begging.

Though some Balahis seem to suspect that this disease is transmitted by infection, most of them believe that it is either inherited, or caused by eating highly spiced meals, and in the initial stages it is often mistaken for syphilis. The Balahis have no medicines against leprosy: leprosy sores and boils are treated like other sores. If leprosy is endemic in a family, and its members have been afflicted for several generations, the Balahis are sometimes said to try the desperate cure of human sacrifice. It is believed that if a new-born baby, or a leper in a far advanced stage of the disease who has first been rendered insensible by drink, is buried alive, the disease will die out in that family.

The children of a leper usually have great difficulties in getting married, especially if leprosy has been endemic in the family for several generations. Even if the children are, to all appearance, quite healthy, they are obliged to pay a double or treble price for a bride from a healthy family. Daughters of diseased families have less trouble in getting married, since it is thought that they are less susceptible to leprosy than males, but even they usually intermarry with boys of a family similarly infected.

When a leper dies, he is not buried like other Balahis. His body is exposed near a river. Balahis who can afford it bring the body of a leprous relative to the river-side of the Nerbudda or Tapti. It is believed that the burial of a leper in the customary manner would bring drought or an epidemic disease upon the whole country.

### Insanity and Idiocy

According to the Census of India 1931<sup>56)</sup>, there were in the Nimar District 30 insane males and 17 insane females per 100,000 of the population. Among the Balahis cases of insanity are rare, but imbeciles and feeble-minded are more numerous. Insane or idiotic children are probably not allowed to grow up, while insane adults are so much neglected that they do not survive long.

Harmless idiots are left free to wander about as they please. There are always some kind-hearted or superstitious people who will give them something to eat in the belief that some spirit has taken possession of the demented and that the spirit can be served and obliged by the giving of alms to the insane.

If the insane becomes violent, he may be tied to a post by his relatives, or even chained, and kept locked up in a room of the house. In one village, for instance, I heard that a demented young man lived for six years in the house of his parents, chained to a post in the back-room of the house. Another harmlessly insane Balahi wanders from village to village, sometimes fairly well dressed, at others almost naked, with long beard and locks. The father of this lunatic is himself subject to occasional periods of insanity, but his brother is a hard-working and clever farmer.

Sometimes the following remedy is applied as a cure for insanity. The demented is firmly tied, an iron is heated and the patient is burnt on his arms above the wrists, at his ankles, on the neck, and on the back of his head.

An insane person is called: 'burnt' — *chal gayo*.

<sup>56)</sup> Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, p. 219. Nagpur 1933.

## Pneumonia

Cases of pneumonia are very frequent. During the monsoon the Balahis work in the fields with no protection against the rain. During a downpour they take refuge under a leafy tree where they sit wet and shivering with cold. After the rain they return to their work without changing their clothes. In the wet piercing winds of the monsoon they catch cold easily and once down with fever they are careless in exposing their bared chest to draught. Another dangerous time of the year is when the cold season changes into the hot season and the evenings are warm. The Balahis omit to cover themselves properly when they go to bed. Towards morning the air grows chilly, and the result is a severe cold which often develops into pneumonia.

Pneumonia is treated by the Balahis in much the same way as malaria-fever. Pains in the chest during breathing are soothed by applying *godha*<sup>57)</sup> or the juice of a certain black bug which gives severe blisters. This treatment is effective not only in pneumonia, but also in pleurisy which often precedes or follows pneumonia. It draws out the serous fluid which has effused in excess between the lungs and the chest wall.

When the Balahis suffer from a cold, they drink a tea prepared of *adrak* (ginger — *Zinziber officinalis*) or of *ajwayan* (*Ptychotis ajowan*), mixed with *gur* and black pepper.

Another effective remedy is believed to be an egg, fried in oil and *ghi*.

Against catarrh the Balahis like to take a pinch of *nausadar* (sal-ammoniac) or *jaiphal* (nutmeg — *Myristica fragrans*).

## Malaria-fever

Malaria is the scourge of the Balahis. Scarcely a man is immune from malaria-fever, almost every one gets it, most of them every year. And the fever generally breaks out at a time when there is a lot of work on hand: in the rainy season or during the harvest.

The Balahis whose quarters on the outskirts of towns and villages are always squalid and swarming with mosquitoes, take no preventive measures against malaria. They would not use a mosquito net even if they could procure and afford to buy one.

The Balahis do not know the difference between malarial and other kinds of fever, and they usually apply the same remedies for all fevers. As soon as a Balahi feels that he is getting fever he drinks plenty of water and lies down. His relatives cover him with all the blankets and spare clothes in the house. Even the face is

<sup>57)</sup> Cf. *godha* treatment in malaria-fever, p. 186.

covered, and one sees only a heap of clothes on the bedstead. This heavy covering produces the intensive perspiration which after a few hours breaks the fever. As soon as the temperature has gone down, the patient crawls out of his bed and basks in the sun. However, slight attacks of fever do not keep a Balahi from work for long; as soon as the fever is broken, he returns to his work. Only a heavy attack of fever, or continual attacks weaken him so much that he has to stay in bed.

Against malaria the Balahis have a number of medicines, but most of them are not very effective. Many do not take any medicine when they get fever but simply wait till the fever subsides. Some Balahis have already learned to value the curative quality of quinine, but they can rarely be made to buy it — it is too new a medicine. If they get quinine pills free of charge, they usually accept them and often also swallow them (though this is not at all certain!).

The most popular remedy against fever is *godha*. Not everybody is able to apply this remedy, but there is in every village someone or other who knows how to apply *godha*. When this man is called in he first tries to find out the most painful spots on the belly of the patient. He presses with his fingers and where it hurts most, he scratches open the skin with a thorn or needle and pours a few drops of the milk of *thuhar* (*Euphorbia nerifolia*) on the wound. The *thuhar* milk cauterizes and, as the Balahi believes, draws the fever out of the organism of the patient. This remedy is believed to be effective also in cases of rheumatism, gout, and many other painful diseases.

The *godha* treatment is not without danger. Though the 'healer' drops sweet-oil on the wound and covers it with a rag or paper the wound often becomes septic. Sometimes the infection cannot be checked and eats deeper and deeper into the body till it results in the painful death of the patient. But in spite of this danger of infection, the *godha* treatment is so popular among the Balahis that few can be found who do not bear the scars of past wounds on their belly. If nobody is at hand to apply *godha*, a piece of iron is heated and the painful spots on the belly are burned till blisters appear. This remedy, the Balahis, admit, is very painful, but it is thought to bring relief from fever.

A less violent remedy against fever, and no less popular, is to take a purgative (*jullab*). The purgative is prepared in the following way: A handful of *sona-pali* (*Sennaefolia*) and *ajwayan* leaves (a plant of the dill kind: *Ptychotis*), four or five heads of garlic, milk of the *bhilawan* shrub (*Semexarpus anacardium*), and *gur* (coarse sugar) are mixed and well boiled in a pot containing about two pints of water. The juice is strained through a thin cloth and given

to the patient to drink. Two or three hours after the purgative will take effect.

Another medicament is taken to promote perspiration. It is called *ukara* and consists in a mixture of *kultis*(?), a roasted *joari* (millet) ear, and the leaves of *ajwayan*. These ingredients are pounded in a pot and, mixed with water, given to the patient to drink. After being wrapped tightly in blankets, the patient soon begins to perspire.

Others expect to be cured from fever by dropping the milk of *gidhan*(?) leaves into their ears. Or they roll a *bahera* leaf (*Terminalia bellerica*) into a ball and stick it into the ears.

The seeds of *kanja* (fever-nut: *Caesalpina bonducella*) are also used as a fever-medicine.

Other febrifuges: The bark of *dudhi* (*Echites frutescens*) or *kudha* (*Holarrhena antidysenterica*), boiled and taken as tea, also a decoction of the bark of *rohan* (*Soymida febrifuga*).

Another fever-remedy is *chirayata* (*Suertia chirata*). A handful of leaves is boiled in water till all the water has evaporated. Then another cup of boiling water is poured over the decoction which is strained through a cloth. This potion the patient drinks twice or three times a day till the fever breaks. Some people boil the roots of the *chirayata* shrub instead of the leaves.

In cases of tertiary malaria, the patient eats the roots of the *gokhru* shrub (*Tribulus lenuginosus*).

One of the greatest difficulties in cases of malaria is maintaining the patient's strength. With the fever the patient loses his appetite, and at the same time the malaria germs kill the red blood corpuscles and exhaust the nerve and muscle tissues. As a tonic after fever the Balahis eat *badam* (almond), either alone or mixed with *sirapuri*, *kopra*, and other dishes which are thought to be very nourishing.

Another tonic is the juice of the *aonla* fruit (*Emblica officinalis*), mixed with *ghi*.

The official Government Health Report of 1939 states that of the six million Indians who yearly die, between one and a half million die from causes attributed to malaria. Deaths from malaria are twice as frequent in rural as in urban areas.

In general it can be said that malaria sets in with the commencement of the monsoon, increases towards the end of it and subsides with the advent of the cold weather which is about the middle of November. Malaria attacks the Balahis from earliest childhood and rarely spares them for long during any time of their life. The frequent fever attacks bring about enlargement of the spleen from which especially the children suffer. Malaria is particularly severe

in the wilder tracts of the district, in villages near the forest, generally in the southern and eastern regions of the Nimar.

Most of the Balahis are not aware that malaria is caused by the bite of mosquitoes (*Anopheles*), infected with *Plasmodia* parasites. They blame the water (*kharab pani*) of certain wells or ponds as the cause of fever. They believe that one gets sick with malaria by drinking 'bad water'. For this reason the Balahis do not like to settle in villages near the jungle, especially if they have to fetch their drinking water from a *nala* or pond instead of a well.

There are no records available as to the frequency of blackwater fever. The Balahis do not distinguish this disease from any other kind of fever. But it appears that blackwater fever is rare in the more civilised central and western plains of the district, while in the eastern and southern parts, particularly in the jungle villages, it seems to be more frequent. There are very few patients who survive this disease.

### Dysentery and Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea is a very common sickness among the Balahis. Diarrhoeic troubles are at their height in the first months of the monsoon.

The Balahis have quite a number of medicines against it: The seeds of *tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum*) boiled in water. Or *Indra jullab*: the seeds of *korai* (*Pongamia glabra?*), the seeds of *dudhi* (*Echites frutescens*), the seeds of *kudha* (*Holarrhena anti-dysenterica*).

The bark of *kudha* is also a good medicine in case of dysentery.

Another specific for dysentery and diarrhoea is the unripe fruit of *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*), either boiled or roasted.

### Stomach-ache

The Balahis often cure stomach-ache by oil massage. Another cure is the following: The patient lies down on his stomach. The 'healer' draws lines on his back with ashes: one long line along his spine, and several shorter lines across his back. Then with two fingers he grips the skin along these lines and pulls hard.

For other bowel complaints the fruit of *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*) is a well-known medicine.

As a caustic or irritant the oily juice of the fruit of the *bhilawan* tree (*Semecarpus anacardium*) is used.

The pulp of the ripe fruit of *bel* is recognised as a laxative.

*Kanj* water (sour rice gruel) is a popular drink when the stomach is upset.

Headache is cured by applying the ashes of *bhilawan* leaves (*Semexarpus anacardium*) to the forehead and sometimes salt and *ajwayan* leaves are pounded and mixed with water and the paste is applied to the painful spots on the forehead.

A popular remedy for headache is snuff. Either tobacco is snuffed or, if available, potassium. The Balahis believe that snuffing expels the bad gases from the brain and clears the head.

### Nose-Bleeding

Balahis get very frightened when they begin to bleed from the nose. They believe that they will die if the bleeding is not soon stopped. They try to stop it by filling the nose with a mixture of seeds of *badam* (almond) grass and *ghi*.

### Inflammation of the Tonsils

This ailment is rather common among the Balahis. Some get better by keeping the throat warm, or they paint the throat with a mixture of *sendhur* (vermilion) and the white of an egg. But more often a quack is called who nips open the inflamed tonsil with the nail of his index-finger and with the tip of the finger presses out the pus. This operation is often dangerous when performed with unclean fingers.

### Inflammation of the Ears

Inflammation of the ears is very common with children because mothers do not always keep them clean. It is cured by pouring into the ear a mixture of hot sweet-oil. This is a popular and, so they say, quite effective remedy.

### Tooth-ache

Tooth-ache is cured by sticking *bahera* leaves (*Terminalia bonducella*) into the ears, or by dropping *dalchini* oil (*cinnamon*) on the aching tooth.

### Eye Diseases

According to the Census of India 1931<sup>88</sup>) 231 males and 351 females per 100,000 are blind in the Nimar District. The percentage of Balahis blind is certainly not below this average. The causes of blindness can be found in the squalor and unhygienic conditions of the Balahi homes, in venereal diseases and smallpox, in the glare of the tropical sun and the dust of the hot season.

<sup>88</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, p. 219. Nagpur 1933.

Cataract cases are frequent and often lead to total blindness because medical treatment even when available is not sought. A great number of Balahis are one-eyed.

Some medicines to relieve inflammation of the eyes are: a pack of *phitkari* (alum) and *haldi* (turmeric), wrapped in a piece of cloth and dipped in baby's urine, which is put on the inflamed eye; *kuku* (the powder of *Mallotus philippinensis*) which is poured into the eye. Other remedies are *kajal* (lamp-black) which is smeared around the inflamed eye, or the soft part of a *guava-pata* (a fleshy cactus plant) which when applied has a cooling and healing effect.

### Diseases of the Kidneys or Bladder

If a patient has difficulties in urinating, which often happens in the hot season, he is advised to drink plenty of water or country liquor. If this does not help, he is told to lie down on his back and somebody pours *sora* (*potassium Nitras*) or *chuna* (lime), sometimes also sulphur, on his navel, to which is added a few drops of water. It is said that this treatment is almost always a help. A diuretic medicine is also *indra-fullab*. Or ripe *bel* fruits with sugar and curd are given to increase the flow of urine in cases of kidney trouble.

### Snake Bite and Scorpion Sting

When a person is bitten by a snake or stung by a scorpion, a generous dose of country liquor seems to be helpful. Another remedy for snake bites is the root of *merhasingi* (*Gymnema sylvestre*), which must be chewed. On the wound the Balahis put a sliced onion which is supposed to neutralise the poison. Aboriginal Gonds know a nut which in many cases gives relief after scorpion stings. The flat part of the nut is scrapped and then pressed on the wound. The nut sticks to the wound till all the poison is neutralised and the pain subsides when it falls off of itself. However, the safest way of curing a snake-bite or a scorpion sting is, in the opinion of the Balahis, to call a *barwa* (magician) who stills the pain and removes the poison by magic. There is no Balahi who does not believe that the *barwa* is the best and surest 'healer' of snake bite and scorpion sting.

### Ulcers, Open Sores, Swellings, Skin Diseases

An ulcer is a sore that will not heal. During the *joari* harvest the Balahis frequently contract such sores from the sharp ends of the *joari* stalks. Owing to splintering and sepsis the sores often develop into big ulcers. Such ulcers, as well as those caused by syphilis and other diseases, are treated with an application of hemp

seed, or wheat grain, mixed with butter, on a leaf of *tombasar* (?) or *phudal* (?). If the leaf is placed on the wound with the inner side on top, it is believed that the ulcer will disappear. If the leaf is placed with the back-side on top, the pus gathers under the skin and the ulcer must be lanced. Other remedies are the powdered bark of *arjun shardul* (*Terminalia arjuna*) mixed with sweet-oil, or a mixture of *katha* (*Accacia catechu*), *tutya* (copper sulphate), *kamela* (?), and *gandhak* (sulphur).

Open sores are often bathed in kerosene oil. Or a rag is soaked in kerosene oil and tied over the wound, and changed frequently.

Burns are generally treated with the milk of the *thuhar* shrub (*Euphorbia nerifolia*), but sometimes castor oil may be applied.

The milk of the *akhau* (*Calotropis gigantea*) is used as an astringent for healing sores and cuts. Others smear *hramji* (red clay) on the wound. But the most primitive method of stopping the bleeding of an open wound is a plaster of wet mud or fresh cow dung.

A furuncle on the eye-lid is cured by rubbing one finger in the palm of the other hand till the finger gets hot. Then the finger is gently pressed on the furuncle.

A woman whose breasts are swollen applies the juice of *mul-khand* (*Celatrus paniculatus*?). The roots of the plant are boiled and the liquor which is very bitter is drunk. The same medicine is also effective for sores on other parts of the body.

Skin diseases, especially scabies or itch, are very common. Most frequently affected are the parts of the body round the waist. For the loin-cloth or skirt is usually tied very tightly and this part of the body is never washed properly.

Dry skin diseases are treated with the milk of *thuhar*, wet sores with a mixture of sulphur and copper sulphate. Another remedy is the oil extracted from *karanja* seeds (*Pongamia glabra*). Or the powdered root of *haldi* is both put on the sores and taken internally. Instead of *haldi* some apply the root of *kachur* (*Curcuma zedoaria*).

### Scurvy

At such times of the year when fruits and vegetables are scarce the Balahis frequently get scurvy. They show all the signs of general debility, get livid spots on the skin, their arms and legs often swell, which is painful. Their gums begin to bleed and the teeth become loose.

Some Balahis say that they get instant relief from the eating of *kajur* (cashew nut).

## Chapter XV

### Death and Funeral

#### (1) Attitude towards Death

The Balahis have little fear of death. They do not think of it very often. They live entirely for the present and do not trouble their minds with thoughts either of the future or of the past. They fear the demons, the evil spirits, whom they see everywhere lurking, in grave-yards, in the trees, in the jungle, at cross-roads and river-crossings. They fear the causes of death and sickness, but death itself they fear much less.

Young people regard death as an affair of old people. But if death overtakes them it is so sudden, generally after a few days of intensive illness, when the body is exhausted by savage fever, when cholera, small-pox, or any other epidemic throws them on their death-bed, that there is little time to think of fear. Then the body is too weak for strong emotions — an exhausted frame is incapable of fear.

Old people, however, have plenty of time to think of the slowly approaching end, and at times feel afraid of it. But their spirit is already broken by a life full of hardship and oppression, by suffering, starvation, and frequent illness, and they have seen so many of their own family die that death is a familiar guest in their houses.

The Balahis are passive by nature. They have been trained by the higher castes to yield to oppression and force. They have been serfs for centuries, and have the spirit of slaves. No wonder then that they yield without much struggle to the irresistible force — death. There is no time when the Balahis think more of God than on their death-bed: "*Bhagwan ki marji!* — It is the will of God!" they say, "it is He Who gave us life and Who takes it again. What can we do against Him?"

And then for the Balahis death is not such a tremendous step. For them there is no finality in leaving this life: Man is reborn after some time and can start life anew. If this life has been a failure, well, there is hope that the next life will be more prosperous and successful. Death is for the Balahis no journey into a distant, mysterious and wholly strange land whence there is no return, it is rather a walk into another room with more or less the same environment. The Balahi argues that it is true that God punishes the wicked, casts them into a hell full of scorpions, snakes, and poisonous worms, that God rewards the righteous and takes them into His heavenly abode. But nothing is irrevocable and eternal. After some time, there is an end to reward and punishment and man begins his pilgrimage on earth all over again.

Besides, the Balahis have little to lose in this life. They do not possess treasures and wordly comfort, they are shunned and despised by everybody, cheated and ill-treated by many; death is for them a redemption from oppression and suffering, starvation and failure. Neither do the Balahis feel any strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of wife and children, for they know that other relatives will take care of them.

## (2) Death of a Balahi

When the Balahis of a village hear that one of their own caste is seriously ill and that there is little hope of his recovery, they go to visit him. They squat down near the sick-bed (*palang* or *khat*) for a short time, speak to the sick and, if possible, they try to make him (or her) understand that they have come to pay a visit to him in his illness. The Balahis lay great importance on such visits and want to be visited when they are ill; they feel great consolation when pitied by friends and relatives in their hours of suffering. The more visitors are around, the better they feel.

The visitors also ask the patient whether he has to tell them anything confidentially or whether there is anything on his mind which he thinks should be put in order, and they frankly suggest that now would be the time to do so. Although the Balahis are mostly very poor and when their last hour comes have not much to leave behind, there are almost always debts which have to be paid, or small loans of money, grain or tools, that have been given to neighbours and relatives, which have to be reclaimed. These matters have to be settled now, because after death it will be difficult for their heirs to claim such loans, nor will creditors find it easy to recover debts from the heirs of their debtors. Rarely are written documents in the hands of the creditors, and the heirs often deny any responsibility for the debts of the deceased. They pretend to know nothing about it or claim that the loan was repaid long ago. Similar excuses are used by the debtors when the heirs come for the money or grain which they had received on loan from the deceased. The Balahis are very keen on taking loans, but they are rather tardy in paying back what they owe. The death of the creditor is in their opinion sufficient reason to consider the matter settled and so it is such affairs that are discussed by visitors at the bedside of the dying. Medical advice, however, they avoid giving to a dangerously ill patient, lest his eventual death be attributed to their ill-advised medicines. After a short while some of these visitors leave and make place for others. Caste-members of some reputation are never without visitors in their last illness.

Balahis, visiting the sick, are generally not anxious to deceive a patient with soothing words about his chances of recovery. Rather are they frank in discussing his dangerous state of health and soon express their doubts as to his recovery. This disregard of a sufferer's feelings might appear as a lack of tact and callous heartlessness. But in reality, the patient himself does not usually mind such frankness. Once a young man asked me in the presence of his dying grandmother if she would recover. Quietly I told him that her death was imminent, but added for his consolation — as I thought — that there was hope as long as there was life in the body. However, the young man did not need my words of comfort. He exclaimed: „But Grandy is already so old, it would be much better for her and for us if she died!" I was shocked. But nobody took his words amiss, not even the sick woman.

Another time an old widow complained to me bitterly that Bhagwan had seemingly forgotten her; all her relatives had died long ago, but she was still alive, left alone in this world. She felt quite consoled when I told her that death would surely not forget her, but would soon come to call her. She thanked me with words that came from her heart.

When at last the end seems near, all the fellow Balahis of the village are called to the house of the dying person. As many as can possibly find place in the house, enter and sit down near the death-bed. The others squat on the verandah or in the court-yard. They talk little, and only in whispers. As death approaches, the nearest relatives of the dying man (or woman) are asked to lift him (or her) from the bed and lay him on the floor. At first the relatives are reluctant to comply with these requests, as in doing this, they would appear to abandon their last hope of recovery. They also fear that the dying man will feel offended if they are too hasty in placing him on the floor. But at last, when the unmistakable signs of imminent death appear on the face of the patient, they lift him gently from his bed and lay him down on the ground.

The Balahis — as all Hindus — believe that man must die lying on the ground. As he was born from the womb of his mother and was laid on ground before her, so likewise should he lie in the lap of the great Earth-Mother, when he leaves this world. No Balahi wishes to die in his bed, and nobody wants to have on his conscience that by his negligence one of his relatives died in bed. This would certainly portend coming disaster for all the relatives of the deceased. In the general opinion of the Balahis a man who dies in bed must always carry his bed with him in the next life. Saddled with such an uncomfortable burden the deceased, it is feared, might take revenge on his relatives who did not take proper care of him in his last hour.

Only a number of expensive offerings could expiate such an omission and set free the poor spirit of the deceased from his troublesome burden. When Balahis quarrel, one of their worst curses is: "May nobody be present in the hour of your death, to lift you from the bed and put you on the floor!" Such a curse is regarded as an unforgivable insult and creates life-long enmity.

If the last agony of the dying person is protracted, a cow is brought into the room and he is made to hold the tail of the cow. It is believed that the sacred cow will lead the departing soul safely into the other world to the abode of Dharmraj, the judge of the dead.

As soon as the dying person has been placed on the floor, the women of the house start their lamentations. Frequently the wife, mother, or daughters of the dying person give free rein to their grief. They throw themselves on the ground, call the dying by name, and implore him not to leave them in distress. In their passionate sorrow they go even so far as to accuse Bhagwan of cruelty and want of pity. They curse God whom they hold responsible for the untimely death of their relative. They address the dying person by the dearest names, enumerate all his virtues and good deeds; and do not hesitate to invent them if need be. They often give themselves up to their grief without restraint, tear their hair and sometimes roll on the ground. Particularly the wife, or mother, of the dying person, is often carried away by the expressions of her grief.

The other women, relatives or neighbours, sing their dirges in shrill and screaming voices, adding to every sentence a series of rhythmical sobs in decrescendo. After a while, when the wildest distress has subsided, the widow joins in these lamentations and often takes the leading part in them. She asks: "Why did you leave me so soon? Was I not always your hard-working and faithful wife? Have I not given birth to a number of good and strong children? Did I not always prepare a good meal for you? Was your house not always clean and well-swept? Have I not always welcomed you with affection and a friendly smile when you returned from work? Or from a journey?" — The mourning women are tireless in inventing more and more questions of this kind, and the younger women listen with rapt attention and repeat these affecting phrases, to imprint them for ever on their minds so that they too may be able to use them when their turn comes for the singing of dirges. These mourning songs of the women sound really most distressing. But it seems also that many a woman experiences a certain voluptuous pleasure in these unrestrained outbursts. Many women find their husbands a burden in good and bad days, and especially is this so in the days of their last sickness. They often

tell friends and relatives that they are heartily tired of nursing them. But nevertheless they are often quite out of their mind at the time of their husband's death. This is not always dissimulation or pretence, for the sorrow is very real, but it is deliberately intensified and many women who have neglected their duty in nursing a sick husband show such a passionate despair in the moment of his death that the onlookers grow impatient and reproach them for showing so little self-control. They may even be reminded of their negligence of the deceased at a time when he would have cared more for love and affection.

Of course, in case of a happy marriage, or in a family with several small children, no such artificial stimulus is required. Then the grief of the widow is indeed genuine, because she will probably have to face a difficult future. If the widow has no children from the deceased, she will soon be remarried to another man who, perhaps, will not love her as much as her first husband; if she has children, she will either have to leave them when she remarries or, if she chooses to live alone and for her children, she will have a hard time feeding them and taking proper care of them.

In their expressions of sorrow, men show much more restraint: at the most the nearest relatives cry a little; they even scold the women and tell them to keep quiet and to suppress their feelings. They call upon their dying relative or friend to remember their former love and friendship, to forget any offence or enmity of bygone days; to regard them always, even in the coming life, as their friends and relatives and to do them no harm. The nearest male relative, a son or brother, lays one hand gently on the eyes and mouth of the dying and closes them, keeping his hand there till the last breath is drawn. After the death a few moments are devoted to their sorrow. The men cry quietly, the women loudly and without restraint. Then an old man attempts to say a few words of consolation to the effect that God has given the deceased just so many days of life: "It is His will, to give life and to take it again; we are powerless and cannot change our destiny!" This is always the most convincing consolation for a Balahi in the face of loss or disaster: "*Kya karna?* — What can we do?"

### (3) Preparation for the Funeral

After a while, all leave the room except the nearest relatives of the deceased. Some men go to prepare the bier for the funeral. The bier is made of two bamboo poles (almost eight feet in length) and five cross sticks (about two feet long). With a long rope the short sticks are tied across the long poles like the rungs of a ladder.

The rope which is used for this purpose is specially prepared: It must be twisted by hand only (without the use of the cord-spinning reel called *boēra*). It is of *amari* fibres and must be made in one piece, not of several rope ends tied together. The cross sticks are tied to the long poles in a peculiar way: the first rung is tied to the long poles by twisting the middle part of the rope round the joints all in the same direction, not cross-wise; then the rope runs along the long poles to the joints of the second rung which is tied in the same manner as the first cross stick. In this way the joints on one long pole are fixed by one half of the rope, the joints on the other pole by the other half of the rope, avoiding always any cross-wise twisting. After fixing the fifth and last cross stick, the two ends of the rope are left hanging, one on either side of the bier. These ends will be used to tie the corpse to the bier.

When the bier is ready, it is turned over so that the cross sticks come to lie under the side poles. Now stalks of *tuar* (*Cajanus indicus*), *khas* grass (*Andropogon muricatus* — Cuscus grass) and *amari* fibres (*Hibiscus cannabinus*) are heaped on the bier and the whole is covered with a cloth. Then a near relative of the deceased cuts a coconut into four parts, puts a *kharik* fruit (date) into the hole of each piece, and ties them firmly to the four ends of the bier with a *nara* string (a sacred string of white and red coloured threads). Sometimes two coconuts are halved, the halves pierced in the middle and a string passed through the hole. The date fruit is tied to the string inside the hollow of the coconut, while the outer end of the string is twisted around the end of the long bamboo poles.

Then the body is lifted from the floor, and on the spot where it lay at the moment of death a line is drawn with cow-dung. This line is held sacred during the next three days, and nobody is allowed to step over it.

The body of the deceased is undressed by some relatives. While two persons at either side of the corpse hold a sheet over the body, two others wash it. Sometimes the bathing of the body is omitted. A man's body is generally washed by male relatives, a woman's by women. Then a strip of cloth, white for a man, red for a woman, is wrapped round the loins, one end is passed between the legs and stuck into the cloth at the back of the body. This dressing is always done by male relatives. The head of a dead man is covered with a turban (*pagri*) of a bright red colour. The turban cloth is folded into a narrow strip and tied round the head. Even on his last journey a man must cover his head with a *pagri*, as custom demands that all men leaving the village should do. A woman is dressed in a *lagra*

in the usual manner. Then the body is placed on the bier and covered with a white, or in case of a woman with a red, shroud.

The clothes used for the dressing of the corpse must be new. For the aged these clothes are generally of good material, while clothes of ordinary quality are considered good enough for young people, and small children are wrapped simply into a small piece of white cloth. The funeral of an old man or woman is considered almost a matter of rejoicing. Old people have lived their full life, and as their last years were full of trouble for themselves and their relatives, their death is looked on as a relief.

After the dressing of the deceased his relatives take a handful of *joari* flour, mix it with water, and form two small balls in which they put two small silver coins (two or four anna pieces), in one of the balls also a copper coin. These balls are put into the hands of the corpse probably as a viaticum for his journey to his new abode. Then all the new clothes which have been bought for the funeral are spread over the corpse. It often happens that such clothes are bought in the market long before the patient actually dies. This is an act of foresight ordinarily not to be expected from a Balahi.

Meanwhile the widow of the deceased — in case he was a married man — dresses and puts on all the jewels and ornaments in her possession. Thus adorned she comes out of the house, carrying a small brass tray (*arti*) with the *panchkoka*: *haldi* (the yellow root of turmeric — *Curcuma longa*), *sendhur* (vermilion), *abir* (a faintly yellow powder prepared of rose leaves, sandal, and saffron), *gulal* (a bright red powder) and *kuku* (dark red powder). The men take the tray and rub the face of the deceased with *sendhur*, *kuku* and *gulal*, till the face takes on a repulsive, unearthly appearance. The *abir* and *haldi* are applied over the red paint on the forehead, at the ears and on the neck of the deceased. The rest of the spices are poured over the cloth that has been wrapped round the head. The painting of the face is done by a relative, of the same sex as the deceased.

A really touching ceremony is the widow's ceremonial leave-taking of her husband. Adorned with all her jewels and ornaments she approaches the bier and once more starts her lamentations. With heart-rending sobs she dips her hands into *haldi* paste which is brought on a tray and presses her palms with wide-spread fingers on the shroud which covers her husband. Such hand-prints are made on the chest and on the loins of the corpse, and at last the right hand is pressed on the navel, so that all in all five hand-prints are painted on the white shroud. To understand the meaning of this ceremony one has to remember that it is custom among the Balahis

to anoint bridegroom and bride with *haldi* for four days before the marriage takes place. This anointment means preparing their bodies for the conjugal life. The hand-prints of the widow, in the present ceremony, signifies that she now returns the *haldi* with which her body was anointed for the conjugal life with her husband, and as he through this anointment had acquired a right over her body and she over his, so she is now withdrawing her body from him and returns also her right over his body. Their mutual relations are herewith severed: from now on their ways part.

The widow now starts taking off her jewels and ornaments. From her forehead she takes the *tikli*, a small round ornament of gold-paper which is worn just between the eyebrows. This she throws on the corpse. Then she takes off her armrings of glass, called *bangli*, breaks one and throws the pieces on the corpse. Then she opens one of the *bichha*, the toe-rings, the sign of a married woman, and puts it down with the other ornaments. Then she removes her other ornaments, the silver hair-dress over the forehead, the *takli* (a snake-shaped silver neckring), and at last the *chuni ki guslai* (strings of glass-pearls, sewn in four or five rows on a piece of cloth and worn on the neck by married women). Other arm and ankle rings a widow may keep, but not those reserved for married women.

If the deceased leaves a widow, his face remains uncovered. If however his wife has died before him, the shroud is drawn over his face.

All these preparations for the funeral are made soon after the death. The hot Indian sun does not allow any delay of the funeral. Moreover, the Balahis consider the deceased as their natural enemy of whom they want to get rid as soon as possible. If, however, death has taken place late in the evening or at night, these preparations for the funeral are made on the following morning and immediately a thick nail is driven into the floor at the head and at the feet of the corpse. By this device the Balahis hope to bind the spirit of the deceased to the ground from where he cannot move and harm the members of the family during the night. They are not so frightened if the deceased is old, and the villagers will come together at the house of mourning and pass the time relating stories or singing. Such gatherings frequently become rather gay and noisy. But if a young man dies before his marriage, or if a woman dies in child-birth, the Balahis are much afraid of the evil mood of the deceased's spirit who by a cruel fate has been cheated of the pleasures of this life and may now be intent on taking revenge. A woman dying in child-birth becomes a *churel*, a particularly malignant spirit, whose fiendish malice can only be counteracted by special magical practices.

#### (4) The Funeral Procession

When all these preparations are made and the corpse has been tied carefully to the bier, four men lift it on their shoulders and proceed to the burial ground. As soon as the funeral procession starts, a son or younger brother of the deceased removes the *joari* balls from the hands of the deceased and, also the silver and copper coins which he keeps as a souvenir and with which he will never part, not even in times of greatest want.

At the head of the funeral procession walks the son or younger brother of the deceased, carrying a smouldering dung-cake in his right hand. He is called the *agwala* (fire-bearer) and should be a kinsman of the deceased, but not a widower. The office of fire-bearer appears to be an important one in the funeral ceremonial of the Balahis and is never dispensed with. If the deceased has no male relatives qualified to fulfil this function another man must be hired. It happened some years ago at Aulia that a Balahi died without leaving either son or brother. His son-in-law was away in a distant village and could not attend the funeral. The village council chose a young man, distantly related to the deceased, to function as *agwala*, since no near relative was at hand. But the widow had to pay him handsomely before the young man agreed to act as fire-bearer. She gave him her house which he later sold for seventy-five rupees.

With the *agwala* goes his wife, or another young woman of the family, carrying an old earthen pot (*handi*) and an old broom (*jharu* or *barhni*). Then follow the carriers of the bier. The body, tied to the bier by passing the rope ends four times crosswise over the body and around the ends of the rungs, is carried feet foremost. The carriers are scantily dressed in an old loincloth, usually without shirt and coat. Even their turbans are old and tattered. Since the carrying of the bier and the touch of the corpse makes them impure, they do not want to defile their good clothes.

The whole procession proceeds at a quick pace, the bier-carriers almost running under their burden. If possible, the village-paths are avoided and the nearest way out of the village is taken; for nobody likes a funeral procession to pass near his house. Women and children are not allowed to accompany a funeral procession. Even the woman who carries the earthen pot and the broom only goes a short distance with the procession, at the most as far as to the last houses of the village; there she throws both pot and broom on a rubbish heap by the way-side and returns. This ceremony signifies that while to this day the women of the family have carried out their duties and served the deceased faithfully, from this moment they consider themselves relieved of all responsibility for his welfare. They now break all connections with him and leave him to his fate.

When the funeral procession starts, all the women of the deceased's family remain within the court-yard, there taking their leave of the deceased with passionate expressions of grief. The Balahis say that women should keep away from a funeral because they cannot control themselves and would disturb the men in fulfilling their last sad duty. But this is scarcely the main reason for forbidding the women to follow the body to the burial ground: the truth is that they believe that women and children are particularly exposed to harm from the evil spirits of the burial ground.

For this reason women and children never go near a cemetery. The Balahis believe that they would at least get a fever if they went near a grave. Even the men are afraid to visit the *mar-ghat*, as the burial ground is called, and never have the courage to visit a grave in a dark night. When on a journey, they will not sleep near a grave. If they get fever, because they have unwittingly done so, they must offer up a cock and a coconut, with *kuku* and *sendhur* etc. Only by such an offering can the evil spirits of the grave-yard be propitiated.

It happened some years ago at Aulia that a Balahi died after a short illness. Three days after his burial his relatives went to the grave to perform the customary offering of a coconut to the spirit of the deceased. It appeared that a hyena or jackal had attempted to dig up the grave and had made a hole almost reaching down to the body. A brother of the deceased squatted down before the hole and filled it up with mud. After the offering all went home. But the same evening the brother of the deceased got sick, became paralysed and could not pass urine. It is said that he became so heavy that four men could hardly lift him. He died the same night. His fellow villagers are convinced that the spirit of his brother, or the *bhut* of the graveyard, had escaped from the grave through the hole which he was busy filling up, and had entered his body. This evil spirit, and not any disease, had made him so sick that he died the very same night.

While the men carry the corpse to the burial ground, they shout incessantly: *Ram, bolo bhai, Ram!* Which means: Rama, invoke Rama, brother! Rama is the favourite god of the Balahis. If the deceased was very old, the funeral procession assumes a rather gay character. A young man is dressed in woman's attire and dances before the procession, a music band or at least the *sing* plays joyful tunes. The men sing funeral songs, the language of which indicates that they are of ancient origin. During the funeral procession some relatives of the deceased throw copper coins (*dhela*) or spices (*singora*) over the corpse. After the procession has passed, boys rush from the houses and pick up the coins which have fallen from the bier.

About half-way to the grave-yard, the bier-carriers stop and put down the bier, but in order to prevent the corpse from touching the ground, they push stones under the four ends of the long poles of the bier. The son or younger brother of the deceased who carries the smouldering dung-cake tears a strip from the shroud and hangs it on a *bor* tree (*Zyzibus jujuba*). He offers a *dhela* (paisa) and, removing the four halves of the coconut from the bier, throws small pieces of the coconut and the four dates on the *bor* tree. The rest of the coconut he gives to the accompanying musicians. This ceremony is called *bor-chindi* (*chindi* means rag) and its purpose is to obtain for the attendants of the funeral protection against the haunting spirit of the deceased. The rag represents the spirit which is appeased by offering it the small coin and the pieces of coconut with the dates. The Balahis believe that by this ceremony the spirit of the deceased can be conjured into the *bor* tree and prevented from returning to his former home to harm the members of his family. The *bor chindi* is a ceremony which should never be omitted. One of the numberless curses of the Balahis is: "May nobody on your funeral procession perform the *bor chindi*!" That means: May you die without children, for it is generally a son who performs this ceremony! It is believed, that anybody who picks up the coin thrown at the *bor* tree will soon die.

After performing this ceremony, the carriers change places, those in front take the place of those who so far had carried the heavier rear-ends of the bier. If the way to the burial ground is long, other men following in the train will relieve the carriers of the bier, but without reducing the quick pace of the procession at the change. Without a halt the procession proceeds to the burial ground. This is generally a waste spot near a river or rivulet (*nala*) covered with thorny bushes. This spot is chosen for the burial ground, because stones are needed which are found in the bed of the river or *nala*, and thorns to protect the grave. There is not the least attempt at any order in arranging the graves in a Balahi cemetery: the graves are scattered all over the burial ground. It is scarcely possible to think of a more disorderly and disconsolate spot than a Balahi cemetery!

### (5) At the Grave

At the burial-ground the carriers put the bier down in the shade of a tree, in such a manner that the head of the deceased points to the north and the feet to the south. The face is turned eastwards, towards the dawn. The *agwala* takes a pickaxe (*kudari* or *gashti*) or a crow-bar (*sabba*) and makes a few strokes on the spot where the grave should be dug. Then he gives the pickaxe to another man,

breaks some branches from a *nim* tree (*Azadirachta indica*) and squats at the side of the body to ward off the flies. The old men sit down at some distance in the shade of a tree and wait till the grave is ready; the younger men and relatives of the deceased dig the grave. With pickaxe and hoes (*phaura*) they dig a long narrow hole, just large enough to receive the body. The grave must be about three to five feet deep and must have a north-south direction, for the feet of the corpse should point to the south. While some men dig the grave, others go and cut thorns or fetch stones from the river-bed.

When they think that the grave is sufficiently deep, they bring the bier and place it beside the grave. They cut the strings which tie the corpse to the bier and take off all valuable ornaments of the deceased, his ear-rings and arm-rings, if he wears any at all. Even his *pagri* is taken away, his waist-string cut and removed. The deceased shall return to Mother Earth naked as he was born from his mother's womb. Now the men lift the corpse gently from the bier and let it down into the grave. One man brings some leaves of the *palas* tree (*Butea frondosa*) or the *bhilawan* tree (*Semecarpus anacardium*). The *agwala* now takes the leaves between his folded hands, but so that the upper halves of the leaves appear between thumb and index finger. All in all there must be 21 leaves which are taken by the *agwala* to sprinkle water into the mouth of the deceased. Either all twenty-one leaves are taken in one bunch, or seven leaves in three bunches, or the leaves are held in two bunches of nine leaves and one bunch of three leaves, or in four bunches of five leaves each and one leaf separately. It depends on the clan of the deceased in which manner the leaves must be arranged. Holding the leaves in one of the indicated ways, the *agwala* dips them into a vessel with water and sprinkles some drops of water into the mouth of the deceased, then he distributes the leaves around the head of the corpse in the grave.

Then the shroud is again drawn over the head of the deceased, but slit open over the mouth. A son or younger brother of the deceased puts a small piece of silver which he has cut from his finger ring into the mouth of the deceased. Then he throws some handfuls of earth on the corpse. Now he withdraws to let the others approach and with their bare hands throw earth into the grave. At last a man takes a hoe and quickly fills the grave half-way. Another man takes a heavy stone and batters the loose earth down after which thorn-bushes are thrown into the grave. The thorns are pressed down with a layer of heavy stones on which more earth is heaped. At last a heap of large stones is piled up over the grave. The heaps of thorns and heavy stones are necessary to prevent jackals, *bijjus* (the Indian

badger, *Ursus indicus*) and *adamkhora* (hyenas) from digging up the grave and devouring the body.

The bier with all the rags on which the body lay is thrown away or burned on the spot. The sheet spread over it is hung on the nearest tree. This sheet (called *mosan*) and other clothes of the deceased are claimed either by the sweeper of the village or by Balahis of the Masanya or Singarya clans. The wooden handles of the pickaxe and of the hoes are taken off and thrown on the grave. They are polluted and may not be used anymore for any other work. Before the funeral party turns homewards, everybody again approaches the grave and lays a *dhela* down, then folding his hands and touching first the grave and then his own forehead he says: "Brother (or: sister), now you have gone to the gods!" From now on the grave is regarded as the abode of a spirit or *bhut* and propitiated as such.

Only in exceptional cases is a deceased Balahi burnt, not buried. The preliminary ceremonies, however, are the same as in the burial, but the body is carried to a near-by river or *nala* where it is placed on the ground and covered with dung-cakes and logs of wood. The *agwala* lights the pyre with the dung-cake which he carries. The large bones are afterwards collected and thrown into the river. The Balahis believe that the chest-bone of a man and the hip-bones of a woman are incombustible.

In times of epidemic like pest, cholera, or small-pox, the bodies of the deceased are simply thrown into the jungle without any attempt at a burial. The ceremonies which ordinarily are performed on the tenth day after death take place when the disease has subsided. However, these ceremonies cannot then be performed at home, but must take place on the banks of the Tapti or Nerbudda rivers. Only the funeral banquet can be given any time at home.

When all the ceremonies of the funeral itself have been performed the mourners return home, the nearest relative of the deceased leading them first to a river or pond. If there is no river or *nala* within reach, the men must bathe at the well or at the house of mourning. But they must cleanse themselves and their clothes from the pollution of the corpse before they are permitted to enter their own homes. The clothes which they have worn during the funeral must be at least wetted. After the bath the clothes are not changed, but allowed to dry on the body.

Returning, the men pass the *bor* tree on which the *agwala* hung a strip of the shroud to their right. Not from this tree, however, but from another *bor* tree close by everybody picks a leaf, takes it in his mouth on the tip of his tongue and spits it out at once. With this ceremony the men express the bitter grief they feel at the loss of their caste-fellow, a grief as bitter as the taste of a *bor* leaf. By

spitting out the leaf they mean to say that they break every connection with the deceased who for ever now has parted from their community. This ceremony is at the same time an omen: If the leaf which the men throw away falls upper side on top, they believe that there is no immediate danger of another death in the village, but if the back of the leaf comes uppermost, a caste-fellow in the village will soon die.

After that all return to the house of mourning. They take care not to look back on their way homewards, for fear lest the spirit of the deceased find his way back into the village if he sees and recognises the face of anyone of his former caste-fellows.

#### (6) Ceremonies at the House of Mourning

Meanwhile the female relatives of the deceased continue their mournful singing. When the woman who carried the pot and the broom at the head of the funeral procession returns and reenters the house, the expressions of grief and sorrow reach their culmination point. But soon afterwards the women become calmer. The widow gets up, folds the cloth on which the body of her husband had lain at the moment of death and takes it under her right arm. Leaving the house, she goes to the well or *nala* followed by the other women. The widow takes a bath and washes her clothes, at which the other women help her. Then they too bathe and wash their clothes. After the bath they return home in their wet cloth, without however wearing their bodices which they carry over their shoulders. On the way from the house of mourning to the well, during the bathing, and on the way back the women never cease to sing their dirges.

On their return way they carry with them a pot of water. They all stop near a *bor* tree from which every woman picks a leaf which she keeps in her right hand. Then all the women crowd around the water-pot and dip a corner of their *lugra* into the water, after which they put the leaves into their mouths and in front of the *bor* tree immediately spit them out, and at the same time they wring out their wet clothes. This ceremony is, as in the case of the men, a symbol of the severance of all relations with the deceased.

Then the women proceed on the way, usually one walking behind the other, the widow or another near relative of the deceased taking the lead.

Arrived home, all enter the house. One woman goes and collects fresh cow-dung with which she smears the spot where the deceased died. Where the head had lain, she makes a small heap of *joari* flour and puts an earthen pot upside down over it. This pot must not be removed from its place until evening.

When the men return from the burial ground, the women recommence their mourning songs for a while. When the singing ceases, a woman takes a large brass plate, fills it to the brim with water and places it before the door of the house. The men put the iron-heads of their pick-axe and of the hoes into the plate; as these tools have been polluted in the digging of the grave, they must be purified. Now the man or boy who carried the smouldering dung-cake to the grave-yard approaches and dips the big toe of his right foot into the water. After him all other men do the same. This seems to be a substitute for the bath which, if it has been omitted at the grave-yard, must however be taken now.

One man of the funeral party then goes to the village shop and buys some *gur*. A near relative of the deceased takes a crumb of *gur* into his mouth and spits it out at once. Then he takes a mouthful of water, gargles and spits out. Again he takes *gur*, but now this time he swallows it and takes some water. This ceremony is repeated by all the men and after them by the women. The woman who carried the pot and the broom at the head of the funeral procession partakes of the *gur* first. The ceremony demonstrates that the bitter taste left in the mouth from the chewing of the *bor* leaf is again sweetened by the taste of *gur*. The mourners return to their normal life when *gur* tastes sweet again, and a *bor* leaf bitter.

The men now sit down quite comfortably and begin to smoke. A near relative of the deceased fills a pipe (*chillam*) and pulls the first draughts, then gives the pipe to the next man who smokes and passes the pipe on to another man. After that all get up and both men and women return home where they change their wet clothes. Only now do they consider themselves clean again and fit to return to their daily work.

In the house of mourning, however, life does not yet return to normal. No meals may be prepared in the house, neighbours and relatives therefore are asked to prepare in these days the meals for the inmates of the house of mourning. They eat the usual *joari* bread with *dal*.

In the evening of the same day some men of the village council (*panch*) present themselves at the house of mourning. They sit down to a friendly chat, after a while they ask the main heir of the deceased: "Brother, have you enough money for a banquet to the caste-fellows?" If the man admits that his funds allow the expenses for a caste banquet, all are well content. But if he is too poor to give a dinner for the whole village community, he may invite for a meal only those who carried the body to the burial ground. Sometimes the caste-fellows of a village each contribute their share for the dinner, and sometimes the family of the deceased is only able to

distribute some *gur* and sweets among the children. The expenses of such a banquet vary much according to the number of Balahi families in a village. If a village community is small, the banquet is not expensive, but in a village of fifty or more families only a few Balahis can afford to give a banquet on the day of the funeral.

This meal in the evening of the funeral day is called *churma*. In it wheat bread should be served which after baking is broken into crumbs and, mixed with *ghí* and *gur*, fried over the fire. Before the banquet begins, one man takes a handful of *churma* and puts it down at the foot-end of the spot where the deceased expired. *Ghí* is poured over the *churma* and lighted. As soon as the *churma* has burned down — it is an offering to the spirit of the deceased — the pot over the pile of *joari* flour is taken off. The pile is examined with eager curiosity to see whether it allows for the interpretation of any suggestive signs and figures on it. Some men or women are capable of interpreting the markings left by straying ants or greedy bugs as follows:

If the figure of a human being can be read into any mark, the deceased is believed to be reborn in a child of the family; if the imprint looks much like that of a cow, or any other animal, the interpreters believe that the deceased will be reborn as a cow, or a dog, or as some other animal. If the pile of flour has remained undisturbed, the spirit of the deceased is supposed to have gone away without the intention of ever returning. The last interpretation is the most welcome one to the relatives of the family.

After that all sit down to dinner. The main heir of the deceased begins. But he and the four bier-carriers are not allowed to eat with the others, but sit apart, for they are still regarded as unclean. The four carriers of the bier eat from one plate, probably so that they shall not spoil too many plates. The women too, at least those who accompanied the widow to the well, partake of the meal. This banquet, given on the evening of the funeral day, is called *trit-bhojan*.

The following ten days are days of mourning. For an hour every morning at day-break, the women of the deceased's family sing their pitiful dirges and these are repeated at any time during the day when the remembrance of their loss overpowers them. In these days relatives of the deceased who live in distant villages are informed of the sad event, sometimes by special messengers. On Thursday, Saturday, and Monday of the following week, some of them come to express their sorrow and sympathy with the bereaved family. They perform the ceremony of eating *gur* and spitting it out again, as a sign that everything, even *gur*, tastes bitter in their sorrow. But then they take another crumb of *gur* which they swallow. The chief mourner of the house (the *agwala*) and the woman who

carried the broom and the pot at the head of the funeral procession are not allowed to leave the house during these ten days.

They must receive the guests. When such guests arrive, the women embrace each other and begin to cry and to sing mourning songs, keeping all the while their hands on each other's shoulders. One woman takes the lead, while the others reply or simply repeat the refrain with rhythmical sobs.

The men greet each other with more composure. They simply say "Ram! Ram!" and then sit down to smoke their *chillam* and discuss the unhappy fate of their relative. Now they are quite willing to make suggestions as to which medicines should have been applied, what *barwa* should have been called, what *mata* or *deo* should have been invoked for help. Some of them insinuate that their relative would certainly not have died if they had been present during his illness. But in the end, especially if the deceased had attained a great age, they always come to the conclusion that it is in no man's power to live forever, that all men have to obey the call of Bhagwan when their time comes. "*Parmeshwar ki marji!* — It is God's will!" is always their last word in such a conversation.

If the mourning visitors live in a near village, they go home after a short visit. But if they come from far, they may stay until the tenth day, when the great funeral banquet takes place.

## Chapter XVIII

### Ceremonies on Days following the Day of Funeral

#### (1) The Third Day after the Funeral

On the third day after the funeral the house of mourning is well cleaned. The floor and the walls are given a coating with fresh cow-dung. The brass-pots are taken outside and washed. Old earthen pots, since they may not be used again, are thrown away. Then a woman sits down and grinds wheat to a coarse pollard. This is boiled. Now the members of the mourning family take a bath, after them also the four men who carried the bier at the funeral. This bath is called *kandhia dhona* (the bath of the shoulder). On the spot where the deceased had breathed his last a fire is lit. Before the fire they place a brass plate with some *ghat* (the boiled wheat-pollard), *ghi* and *gur*. The chief mourner takes a small portion of each ingredient, mixes the whole well, rolls it into a ball and throws it into the fire, while addressing the deceased thus: "This sacrifice of *ghat*, *ghi* and *gur* we now offer you on the third day, as you must be hungry and thirsty." The Balabis believe that the spirit of the deceased now and then visits his former abode and may harm his kinsfolk unless they have something ready for him to eat and to drink.

After that the *agwala* (the young man who carried the dung-cake to the graveyard) and the four bier-carriers go to the burial ground. They tidy up the grave and give it a coating with mud and cow-dung. Then they burn a mixture of *ghat*, *ghi* and *gur* on the grave, saying: "Now we perform our sacrifice. Be kind to us all, do not harm us or our children." They salute the grave by touching it with folded hands; for the grave is now the abode of a *bhut*, the spirit of a deceased.

Then they return home, where they take a bath to purify themselves from the polluting touch of the grave. Only then all members of the mourning family as well as the four bier-carriers, sometimes also other relatives and friends of the family, sit down to eat the *ghat*.

## (2) The Tenth Day after the Funeral

On the market-day which falls within the ten days after the funeral the nearest relatives of the deceased buy the necessary provisions for the great funeral feast on the tenth day. They meet friends and relatives at the bazaar and invite them to the banquet. The Balahi-Brahman too is invited to perform the last sacrifice. Only those who are invited will partake of the banquet. If the deceased had many relatives, and if the mourning family can afford the expenses, from two to five hundred or even a thousand guests may be invited to this banquet. Once I heard an old sick Balahi-woman pray: "O, God, let me not die now. Wait with your call till harvest. Then there will be money in the house and my sons may be able to give a big *khana* (banquet) after my death." The more the guests invited for such a banquet, the greater is the glory of the deceased in this world and his happiness in the next. On such a day the host does not spare money. He spends it lavishly, even if he has to sell his last bullocks or the jewels of his wife and has to take a loan from the money-lender. He will starve with his family for a year and be a pauper for the rest of his life in order to provide an adequate funeral banquet for his father or mother. Age-old custom demands it, and a good Balahi considers it his most sacred duty to act according to this tradition of his caste.

On the ninth day after the funeral the house of mourning is again cleaned and smeared with cow-dung. All the furniture, pots, pans, and plates are thoroughly cleaned and washed. Everything must be in order for the reception of the guests.

About noon of the 10th day the guests begin to arrive. They are received by the near relatives of the deceased.

The women begin to sing mourning-songs and cry when prominent guests or near relatives arrive. They will also cry and

sing dirges, when the Balahi Brahman appears. By 4 o'clock all the guests should have arrived and the Balahis of the village and those guests who have arrived early, are busy preparing the *khana*. The other men sit down and chat.

Now the *nai* wanders through the village and shouts "*Chalo, chalo, ghar ke pas ao!* — Come, come to the house of mourning!" One man of each family, of the guests and of the villagers proceeds to the house of mourning. A bullock-cart is made ready, and a huge pot of boiled rice and a smaller pot of *dal* are placed on the cart. The *agwala* covers his head and shoulders with a bag, folded like a hood or head-cover which is used in the monsoon as protection against the rain. Then he takes a basket (*topla*) on his head. In the basket is a pot with boiled rice, wheat bread, *ghi*, and a hand-twisted cotton-thread (called *kanda* or *kachcha sut*). As in the funeral procession, the *agwala* carries in his hand a smouldering dung-cake and leads the procession to a near-by *nala* or river. He must avoid looking back once he has started on his way. The whole crowd of villagers and guests follow him in loose groups, even late-coming guests send a representative to attend this ceremony. The chief mourner (*agwala*) goes ahead, followed first by the Balahi Brahman, then by the *nai* and the deceased's relatives. After them walk the other men, and at last the widow surrounded by a few old widowed women. Married women and girls do not attend this performance.

At the river or *nala* the men sit down in groups in the sand. The *agwala* and the carriers of the bier take a bath.

#### (a) Rites Performed by the Balahi Brahman

The Balahi Brahman now begins his performance. He brings four oblong stone slabs from the river and places them in a square, two close together, the other two at right angles with the first pair. He covers the stones with wet clay and forms a mound cubical in shape, about two feet in length and as much in breadth and height. Meanwhile the *nai* cuts some *jamun* (*Eugenia tambulana*) or *gular* (*Ficus glomerata*) branches. The Brahman selects four branches, about two feet long, which he sticks into the soft mould at the four corners. He lays other branches across the tops of the corner sticks and ties them tightly. Then he covers the whole structure with *jamun* or *gular* leaves.

Meanwhile the men who went to bathe in the river return. The *nai* calls the *agwala* and both men squat down near the water and the *nai* begins to cut the *agwala*'s hair, then shaves his head completely, also his moustache if he has any, as well as the hair in his armpits. Then another man throws a sheet over both and the

*agwala* opens his *dhoti* as the *nai* has also to shave the hair on his belly and his pubic hair. After the *agwala*, other near relatives of the deceased and the four carriers of the bier are shaved in the same manner. Not a single hair ought to remain on their bodies, so custom demands. After the shaving all go to the river and take a bath. As one Balahi explained to me, this shaving signifies that now the chief mourners shake off their sorrow and grief like the hairs which fell from their bodies under the shaving knife. From this day they may again enjoy the things of this world<sup>59</sup>).

After that the Brahman sends the *agwala* and one of his relatives to the river to fetch a big stone. This stone is placed near the water, a little apart from the Brahman's mound. The *agwala* and his companion who helped him to carry the stone now cover their heads with a bag as they did on their way to the *nala*. The Brahman hands them a brass tray with boiled rice, coconut, *kuku*, *kharik*, and *kapur*. He tells them: "*Uski arti karo!* — Offer to him!" The stone represents Ganpati who always receives the first offering at all Hindu ceremonies. Both the men, covered with the bag, approach the stone, squat down before it, burn *kapur*, break the coconut, and apply *kuku*. This offering is made in silence. But they are supposed to say in their heart the following prayer:

"*He Ganpati Deota, Main apse barabar binti karta hun ki jo main apne bap ka kriya kar raha hun us men mujhe aur mere sab gharane par apki wa Bhagwan ki kriya aur ashish rahe taki sab kam thik se ho kisi prakar ki larai bipatti na ho aur panch achchhi terah mere ghar men jinen* — O Ganpati, I pray to you that everything that I perform for my father's happiness may bring to me and all my family yours and Bhagwan's grace and blessing. May every ceremony be performed properly, without fault and harm, and may the whole party partake of a happy meal in my house!"

Then both rise, take the covering from their heads and return to the Brahman who tells the *agwala*: "Mix boiled rice, milk, and *ghi* and form eleven balls (ten for the ten days since the deceased's death, and the eleventh for Ganpati). Sometimes these balls are formed of earth instead of rice flour. Meanwhile the Brahman draws a *chauk* on the mound in yellow with *haldi* powder and into the big *chauk* a smaller one in red with *kuku* powder; then within the second *chauk* a third in white with *joari* flour. Around the *mandap* on the mound he draws another *chauk* with *gulal* (a bright red powder). Then the Brahman asks a man to bring two big stone slabs from the river or from a well. These two stone slabs (some-

<sup>59</sup>) This explanation is, to my opinion, far-fetched. The shaving is part of a purification ceremony, and is performed also in the *sarni* ceremony.

times there is only one) represent *Sakti*, the mother of *Brahma*, *Beshnu*, *Maresh*, and the ancestress of the *Balahis*. The stone slabs as well as a smaller stone which represents *Ganpati* are placed on the mound under the *mandap*. The eleven balls of *ghat* are also placed in the *mandap*. Now two men go and cut some river-grass, called *dobri*. They form small rings of the single blades which they call *mundi* (ring). All the men who have been shaved put a ring on the small finger of the right hand. Then the *Brahman* ties a red thread (*nara*) round the right wrist of each man, while the rest of the mourners who had not been shaved merely sit around and watch the performance of these ceremonies.

Then the *Brahman* ties a thread (*kachcha sut*) round the corner sticks of the *mandap*, to ward off the evil spirits. After that he puts a longer thread over the left shoulder of each man, knots it under the right arm, like the sacred thread (*janeu*), worn by high-caste men. Now the men step into the river and squat down at a shallow spot. Midway between the mound and the men squatting in the water the *Brahman* places a burning dung-cake and a *lota* of water. Then he burns incense sticks at the four corners of the mound (*bedi*) and performs a sacrifice. He offers different kinds of powders and spices as *gulal*, *panch koka*, *abir*, *chautilli*, *misri*, *toda*, *laung*, *ilaichi*, and all the other ingredients which are used at an offering. Then he addresses the relatives of the deceased with the following words: "*Dekho, bhaio, main is samay sakshat Brahma Stashti rachhaya ki jagah par baitha jo mujhe Brahma Dev ki or se adhikar mila hai, ki tum prithvi ka sab kam achchhi tarah se logon ko swarg wa narak jane ka wishwesh karan ballawo ki jo nar pitr punja kare waha apne buzurgin ke liye tum se jo dega so mere ko dega aur waha marnewala admi sab yahan pauega*". (See, brethren, I am now sitting here, in the face of *Brahma*, as the representative of *Stishti*, the demon, appointed by God *Brahma* himself in order that you may live on earth and that it may be shown by me how the funeral rites are to be performed in the right order and how the people on their way to the place of reward or punishment shall be shown the river-bank of *Vishwesh*. And whoever of you is going to make a sacrifice to the father of mankind, he should give to me what he wants to offer in his generosity, that the deceased may find everything there!")

Then he continues: "*Ganpati* is the supervisor of the world. Even if your father is in hell, *Ganpati* can help him. Therefore offer 5 annas to *Ganpati*, and 5 copper coins to *Sakti*. And 10 annas which I will spread all over the *chauk*. Then put one copper coin on the *arti*, throw one *dhela* into the *lota*, and one on the dung-cake". After that the *Brahman* says: "I will pray now to all the gods." He forms

the shape of a cow (*gavitri*) of wheat flour (or clay) and prays: "He *gavitri*, jo tu sab sanskar wa swarg wa paital wa mrityu lok men manushyon ke liye pratipal kahe, aj ye sab us marne wale ke samaurtti sab teri daul se punja karte aur madad mangte ki he *gavitri* us mare hue admi ko tribeni ma Makundi se amrit ghar se swarg men pravesk kar!" (O, cow, who hast promised support to all the world in heaven, on earth, and in the region of the dead, all who have assembled for the dead, invoke thy help and pray for thy support, o cow, that the deceased may gain entrance at the meeting of the three ways in the immortal house of Makundi (Vishnu), in heaven!" Saying this he makes an offering to the cow. After that he implores all the gods to forgive all the sins of the deceased. Before the image of the cow five annas are then offered.

Now the Brahman commands the near relatives of the deceased to perform the *bal kunwari* ceremony. He says: "Pray for your father that the gods may forgive him all that he may have thought, said, and done since the fifth year of his age. May be that he is in a place of punishment, therefore draw water from the river and throw it into the air, five times for the deceased's childhood, ten times for his sins in youth and twenty times for his sins afterwards. Water is holy, it purifies from all sin!"

This done, the Brahman forms sixteen balls of wheat flour or of earth, called *pind*: five balls for the performance of the *bal kunwari* ceremony, ten balls for the ten days (*daswan*) which have passed since the day of death, and one ball (called *igur pind*) for the sin of quarrelling which the deceased might have committed with his companions on the way to the court of judgement. On each ball the nearest relative of the deceased puts a *dhela* which is later given to the Brahman. The *agwala* takes the balls, first the five, then the ten, and last of all the single *igur pind* and throws them into the river. Now the Brahman tells the men to pour water over their own heads, twenty-one times for the twenty-one generations of their own family, then to throw seven times water into the air for the sun that his light may shine on the deceased's path to the place of judgement. At last they must say a prayer to God and worship the figure of the cow on the mound, with joined hands touching first the ground in front of it and then the Brahman's feet. After that they again throw water into the air with their hands in honour of Unkarji (the local name for the Trimurti: Brahma, Beshnu, Mahesh). This water-offering is called *pani chhorna*.

Now the Brahman asks for some presents, he says: "Whatever you give to me, is a gift made to the deceased: A horse, that he may be able to ride to the place of judgement; a cow, that he may have milk to drink on his way; a bed, that he may be able to take a

rest". Even wealthy relatives however seldom give him such valuable presents, instead of a horse he may receive a rupee, another rupee may be presented for a cow, sometimes he gets a *thalli* (brass-tray), a *lota*, a *dhoti*, *pagri*, a shirt, shoes, or an umbrella, and only very rarely a cow or a bullock. The Brahman may ask for five rupees in cash to get only one-and-a-quarter rupees instead. He has generally to be content with less valuable gifts for few Balahis can afford to pay large fees.

After that the Brahman takes a bath and dons the new *dhoti* and shirt which have just been presented to him. The near relatives of the deceased approach and apply *kuku* to his forehead, and he in turn paints their foreheads with *kuku*, rubbing the powder with the thumb from the nose upwards. The Brahman then worships again in front of the mound which soon afterwards is with the stones, the cow, and the balls thrown into the river. It is believed that through his performance the Brahman has conjured the spirit of the deceased into the mound and that with the immersion of the same in the water the soul is delivered from all attachment to its former life and can now freely proceed to the place of judgement.

After that all men who took an active part in the ceremonies again bathe and change their clothes. Then the bamboo basket is opened, the wheat loaves are taken out, the pots with rice and *dal* are carried to the river-side. All sit down in rows. The *agwala* is served first. He gets a piece of bread, a handful of rice, *dal*, a few crumbs of *gur* and some drops of *ghi* on a big *palas* leaf. After him the others are served, first the men, then the widow of the deceased and her companions. When all have received their share, the *agwala* is requested to begin eating. As soon as he starts, the others fall to except the Brahman who usually does not eat because he thinks himself above the ordinary Balahis. When the meal is over, all get up, wash their hands and rinse their mouths.

Now some sheets are spread on the ground and the *agwala* takes his seat on them. He dons a new *dhoti*, a new shirt and a new *pagri* which on this occasion is called *gondola*. Then all the guests come and each man puts a four-anna piece on the sheet in front of the *agwala*. This money is called *tika*, and is probably a contribution towards the expenses of the meal which has just been held. All in all about ten to twenty rupees are thus collected.

After the *agwala*, the widow of the deceased is dressed by her companions in a red *lugra* (main garment of a Balahi woman, covering body and head) which is presented by a near relative of hers. This *lugra* is called *ronsala*. The widow's old clothes are thrown away and any poor woman may take them, but if none comes

forward, the *agwala* takes them home where they are used again after being washed.

Now the *nai* paints everybody's forehead with *kuku*, beginning with the *agwala*. He gets a paisa from every man for this service. The women paint each other with the sacred red powder. Then the *nai* asks for his fee and the main heir of the deceased or his widow pays him from two to five rupees, he often gets in addition the valuable present of a silver neck-ring (*takli*) costing about ten rupees.

Now all get up and embrace each other with the greeting "Ram! Ram!" and return to the house of mourning. On their arrival in the village the women again begin to sing dirges. It is already about sunset when the party returns from the river. The performance of all these ceremonies takes a long time, for they do not follow each other in orderly sequence. Sometimes a requisite is missing and must be brought from the house, or the men do not agree on the ritual procedure and a discussion follows till the doubtful point is cleared to everybody's satisfaction. Such doubts often arise if the Balahi Brahman is absent and an ordinary Balahi officiates in his place. His fee is of course accordingly lower—what the Balahi Brahman receives in rupees, he gets in annas!

When the party returns from the river-side to the village, the great funeral banquet is ready. But if the day is already far advanced and it is getting dark, the *khana* (dinner) is sometimes postponed to the following day. In such a case the guests from distant villages who cannot go home for their evening meal, are served *joari* bread, or rice with *dal*, so that they will not go to sleep hungry. The Balahi Brahman often leaves directly after his performance at the river. But if he intends to stay for the night and to attend the dinner he gets provisions (*kachcha saman*) with which to cook his own meal since he does not eat with other Balahis.

At last the funeral banquet is ready. All sit down and eat to their heart's content. This banquet is called *mangal saraddh*. Before the guests begin to eat, an offering is made to the spirit of the deceased on the spot where he expired: *dhup*, a mixture of rice, *joari* bread, *gur* and *ghi* is poured into fire.

After the meal the guests wash their hands, rinse their mouths and get up. The servers come and gather the leaf-plates which they throw on a heap somewhere out of the way. These leaves are fed to the cattle unless they are snatched away by the village dogs.

When the sun sets, the guests assemble for some kind of entertainment. Sometimes a big pole (*kam*) is erected, from the top of which may hang many coloured tapes. The musicians come with their instruments, drums, flutes, the *sing*, etc. If the host cannot

afford a big band there are always some men in the party to accompany the singing and dancing with drums and cymbals (*jhanak*).

The singers sing the old funeral songs which begin with a hymn praising Ganpati, the son of Shiva (Mahadeo). These songs, in old, obsolete and often hardly intelligible language, depict the whole life of man from his birth to his grave and provide a good insight into the Balahi philosophy of life. They are called *mangal* (sacred songs).

When the gathering grows animated, the men rise and begin to dance to the rhythm of the drums, gripping the coloured tapes hanging from the dance pole. A good dancer, who is often a professional, is dressed up as a woman and adorned with all the jewels which he is able to borrow from the women of the village. He is usually also a singer whose verses are repeated by the chorus. At these gatherings only the men dance, women never join them, but sit apart and look on. Sometimes they form their own group and dance and sing. The dancers never seem to get exhausted by dancing, and the singers never appear weary of singing, nor is the audience ever tired of watching the dance and listening to the singing. Sometimes the singers stop and one of the party who knows how to interpret the old songs explains the meaning of a difficult verse. The younger people listen with rapt attention and at such times get some inkling of the great problems of life and death. It is said that most of these funeral songs are compositions of the great Kabir who himself was a weaver. These songs which are passed on orally from one generation to the other, have naturally changed much in language and content, and are now coloured by the local peculiarities of the caste who sings them. These songs are full of wise maxims and tell of the majesty of God, of the transitoriness of the world and of human life, of the blessings of a good life and the vanity of human happiness. Their philosophical tenets are those of Kabir, the weaver philosopher and ascetic.

Time passes quickly. The singers and dancers carry on till the sun rises. Then one after the other drops out and lies down for a short rest, somewhere in the house of a friend or relative or simply in the open, covering himself with his turban cloth or a sheet which he has brought along for this purpose.

#### (b) Rites Performed by the Balahi *sadhu*

While the other guests go to bed, the relatives of the deceased are not yet able to take a well-earned rest. A new personality appears on the stage, the Balahi *sadhu*, who so far has kept in the background though he arrived early enough to partake of the big funeral

banquet. For the Balahi *sadhu* is not so particular as the Balahi Brahman and does not refuse to eat with the ordinary Balahis. He now starts his ceremonies in the room where the deceased expired.

The spot on which the deceased died is covered with a thin layer of cattle-dung. On this a *chauk* is drawn with *joari* flour, and then about a pound of *joari* flour piled on the *chauk*, with a *supari* and a *dhela* on top of it. In front of this pile another *chauk* is drawn on the ground over which a cloth is spread. Then the *deo* of the *sadhu* is placed on the cloth. This *deo* is a small brass-image of the *sadhu's* favourite god, either Ganpati-Ganesh, or Vishnu with four arms, Mahadeo, or any other Hindu deity. Before the image is placed on the cloth, it is washed in milk and painted with *kuku*. A *diya* is placed before the *deo*.

Now the relatives of the deceased bring two earthen pots, the bigger one holding about two seers (a seer = 1.76 English pints), the smaller one about half a seer. These two pots are called, obviously for reason of their proportionate size, *sawaghara*, which means one-and-a-quarter pot. Both pots are adorned with geometrical designs in yellow, bright red and dark red colours. These pots are made by the potter expressly for this purpose, and should not have been used before for any other purpose. The big pot is placed before the *deo* and on it the smaller pot, and both pots are then covered with a red cloth, a coconut is placed in the mouth of the smaller pot, and another red cloth is spread over the whole. The *sadhu* now takes his neck-lace (*mala*) of brown beads from his neck and winds it around the pots. The pots are empty, except for five copper coins, two sticks of *kapur* (camphor) and the *diya* with the burning wick. This light in the earthen pot represents the soul of the deceased. Between the two *chauks* a smouldering dung-cake is placed on the bare ground.

All the relatives of the deceased squat around the paraphernalia of the *sadhu*. Two incense sticks are burned on each *chauk*. Each man of the deceased's family pours a mixture of *jau* (barley) grain, *tilli*, *ghi* and *gur*, on the burning dung-cake. Then all pour rice-grain and *kuku* on the *deo* and on the two pots. Now the *sadhu* demands wheat bread, roasted without salt, and a handful of boiled rice; he distributes the crumbs of the bread and the rice grains among the relatives who each give him a *paisa*. This is called *newta* or *niwat* (invitation). It is believed that with each coin given to the *sadhu* the deceased's soul proceeds nearer towards heaven. Even if the number of relatives present is small, at least 21 copper coins must be presented to the *sadhu*. This ceremony is called: *swarg ki pairi charhana* (to cause one to ascend the stairs of heaven).

After that the *sadhu* takes his *mala* and the coconut from the two pots. He breaks the coconut over the *deo*, saying: "As I break this coconut, the spirit of the deceased must leave this place!" When he burns the *kapur* sticks, he prays addressing the deceased: "May God forgive all your sins and faults and receive you into heaven just as these sticks of *kapur* burn and the smoke rises to heaven!" During this performance a man rings a small bell, while all fold their hands and bow their heads in the conviction that the god, represented by the image, is physically present in the flames of the *kapur*. The flames, however, cannot be seen by any but the *sadhu*, for the *kapur* sticks after they are lighted remain in the earthen pot.

The *agwala* (the man who carried the burning dung-cake at the head of the funeral procession) winds the *mala* of the *sadhu* around his hands and lifts both pots from the ground. The pots are again cautiously covered with a cloth to prevent a puff of wind extinguishing the *diya*. The *agwala* then carries the pots to a near-by well or to a stream. There he carefully removes the covering cloth, the *mala*, and the five copper coins which are given to the *sadhu*. Then he sets the pots with the burning *diya* in the water. This done, he runs away quickly, without once looking back.

When he arrives at the house of mourning, the women of the family begin to cry (as they cried when he left the house with the two pots), for now without any further chance of return the spirit of the deceased has left them for ever. Sometimes the *agwala*, if he is too afraid to go alone, is accompanied on his errand by other relatives. Sometimes a coconut is offered at the stream before the pots are left in the water. On the return of the *agwala* the *sadhu* addresses the relatives of the deceased as follows: "I have now driven away the spirit of the deceased. He has left the house. What is my reward?" The main heir of the deceased pays the customary fee of one and a quarter rupees; if he is very poor he pays less, but at least four annas. Before the fee is paid, the man applies *kuku* and pays his respect to the *sadhu* by touching his feet with folded hands.

Now *dhup* is prepared: it consists of a porridge of *joari*, bread-crumbs, mixed with *ghi*, *gur*, and sugar. Five balls of *dhup* are placed before the *sadhu's deo*, and later given to the singers of the past night and the companions of the *agwala*. Also the *nai* and the *bhat*, if they are present, get their share, and in addition two *paisa*. This is called *barwahi* (share). Then the *sadhu* asks the *nai* to distribute the offerings made to the *deo* among the relatives of the deceased. The meal which follows is called *prasad* (sacrificial meal). It is generally about seven or eight o'clock in the morning when the ceremonies are finished.

The Balahis maintain that the ceremonies of the Balahi *sadhu* are more important than those of the Balahi Brahman, since with the latter they can also be performed by any other man if the Brahman is absent. But the *sadhu* who officiates on the tenth day after death must be the one whose disciple (*chela*) the deceased had been. Without the performance of the *sadhu* (*guru*) the soul of the deceased cannot find the way to the seat of judgement and consequently wanders aimlessly around in the dark jungles of the nether-world.

The Balahis believe that with the performance of the rites of the *sadhu* the soul of their deceased relative has reached its destination and peace and will never again return to its former home to haunt and harm the surviving members of the family.

With this pious hope they feel relieved and consoled and can set about enjoying a good meal at which, to honour the occasion, goat's meat must be served. The nearest relatives of the deceased have not been permitted during the ten days of mourning to eat meat and now look forward to a dish of goat's meat, the more so since this time the guests have to defray the expenses. They go to the bazaar, buy goat's meat or a few fowls, salt, red pepper (*mirchi*), and whatever else is required for a tasty meal. All the mourners have left and so it is only the nearest relatives of the deceased for whom the dinner is prepared. Dinner is taken in the late afternoon, the members of the deceased's family eat first — since they are the guests —, then the others (who this time act as the hosts) and some villagers who have been specially invited for this meal.

After the meal they do not sit around long, as is the custom on other occasions, but soon go to bed tired out by the excitement of the last days. Early next morning the guests from distant villages rise, get their bullock-carts ready and take leave of the family of the deceased. The members of the deceased's family gradually return to their customary routine of life which has been so sadly interrupted by the loss of one of their family. If the deceased has left a young widow who may want to remarry after some time, she too will leave and return to her parents.

### (3) After the Tenth Day

After about two weeks the relatives of the deceased pay a return visit to all their guests. This visit is called *birani tel* and is an expression of gratitude for the sympathy offered in the days of mourning.

Between three or five weeks after the funeral the relatives again burn *dhup* as a last offering on the same spot where the deceased expired. With this last offering they consider that all has been done that is possible for the deceased's welfare in the other world.

These funeral ceremonies are performed in the described form only for an adult married man or woman, the only variations in the rites observed are in accordance with the sex of the deceased, as for instance the dressing of a female corpse in a *lagra* instead of a loincloth and turban, the omittance of the widow's leave-taking and the substitution of the daughter-in-law for the daughter at the head of the funeral procession. But the essential rites are the same whether the deceased is a man or a woman. For a child or even for a young married man or woman some of these rites may be omitted, often only the ceremonies of the funeral and of the third day are performed. For infants the funeral rites are very simple. No special ceremonies are performed on the third and tenth day, and no sacrifices are offered.

But even for adults all the above described rites are not always performed. Peculiar circumstances, such as poverty, or inconvenient time, an epidemic, or other reasons may provide an excuse for omitting certain rites. But the funeral banquet on the tenth day after the funeral is rarely omitted. If the time is inconvenient (as in the monsoon) or if funds are insufficient for a big banquet, it may be postponed till a more convenient date. In such a case the relatives of the deceased give a dinner only for the villagers, and hold out hopes to the others for the time of the harvest or the following year. Sometimes this banquet is postponed for two or three years.

#### (4) The Balahi Conception of the Human Soul

All Balahis have some vague ideas about the strange thing which, for want of a better name, is called the soul. The Balahis distinguish, quite apart from the body, different elements in a human being: The inner self or spirit of man which they call *atma* or *hamsa*, his vital principle (*jan* or *pran*), his mind or reason, called *aql* or *buddhi*. While a man's *buddhi* is inseparable from him, his *jan* or *pran* may leave him (in dream or death); the inner self and soul of man, however, is immortal and remains intact even without a body. It is this element of man which is reborn after death. While the body of a child is formed in the womb of his mother, after conception, the foetus becomes alive after a certain period of pregnancy, though, in the opinion of the Balahis, it has no soul yet. At what moment exactly the soul enters the foetus, the Balahis do not know. The general belief is that the soul enters the body in the seventh month of pregnancy of the mother, because many children born after the seventh month of gestation are to all appearance quite normal and endowed with a soul. But the Balahis also believe that it can happen that a foetus is born alive, and yet without a soul.

Such a being is a monstrosity which, after birth, is quietly removed and killed.

Such Balahis as have given some thought to the problem of the origin of the soul believe that Bhagwan has created a certain number of souls which are over and over reborn in the world, Balahis as Balahis, and high caste people as high-castes, all in their respective caste. The Balahis generally maintain that they are always reborn in their own caste, though they admit that in other castes it may perhaps be otherwise. It may be that some Balahis, better versed in the Hindu traditions, hold more orthodox views regarding *karma* and transmigration of souls, but the average Balahi is of the opinion that no Balahi can be reborn outside his caste.

That a man scarcely ever remembers his life in a former birth is explained by a simile: As a man still bears the scars of a wound inflicted in childhood, without remembering in the least when and how it was inflicted, so a soul remembers nothing of a former birth, though the fruits of former good or evil deeds produce their after-effects in the next birth.

While the Balahis generally believe that a child is the reincarnation of a deceased Balahi, they do not identify the child with any particular person unless the child bears some features strikingly similar to that person. But generally a soul is believed to be reborn in the same clan, if not in the same family.

About the fate of the soul, after death, the average Balahi has no clear ideas. If one asks a Balahi where his soul will go after death, he invariably replies: "*Bhagwan ke pas!* — To God!" But to inquiries for more exact details about the life after death, the Balahis usually reply with a shrug of their shoulders. Asked whether there is a difference of treatment for the good and the bad, the Balahis maintain that the souls of just people go straight to God, while the souls of wicked people go to hell (which they conceive as a big hole full of scorpions, poisonous snakes and hideous worms). That the souls are reborn after some time is a common belief among the Balahis. But they are not sure about anything that pertains to life after death. If pressed for details, they relate the current beliefs of the Hindus.

Once a Balahi *sadhu* gave the following account of the fate of the soul after death: "When the soul separates from the body, it remains for ten days near its former abode. During this time the soul is dangerous to former relatives and friends because it envies the survivors. It is possible also that a *bhut* (evil spirit) enters the body of the deceased and returns in his form and shape to the deceased's home to harm his relatives. It is the task of the Balahi Brahman and of the *sadhu* to prevent the spirit of the deceased from returning to

his former home. The performance of the funeral rites is intended either to safeguard the welfare of the surviving relatives, or to assist the spirit of the dead in attaining *mukti* (salvation).

On the tenth day after death, the soul arrives at the place of judgement. It is the junction of three ways (*tribeni*)<sup>60</sup>: One way comes from the earth, accompanied by a stream of blood; the second way leads to heaven, along a stream of ambrosia (*amrit pani*); and the third way leads to hell, along a stream of pus and excrements. At the place of judgement the soul is immersed in a river which contains elements of all three streams: blood, ambrosia, and pus. After a while Dharmraj, the divine judge of the dead, pulls the soul out of the river and perceives which kind of the river's fluids the soul has swallowed; if blood, the soul returns to the earth and is reborn in another Balahi; if ambrosia, the soul goes to Bhagwan's abode; if the soul has swallowed pus and excrements, it is sent to a place of punishment. The soul which has swallowed blood, is neither good nor wholly bad, and has therefore to return to life on earth for another chance to do better or worse. Only souls which have reached perfection, may enter heaven; while souls which are wholly bad, go to the place of punishment."

The Balahis are ignorant of the circumstances of the place of reward, but they seem to have a better knowledge of the kind of punishment that is meted out to such as have led a bad life.

The soul of a wicked person is thrown into a huge iron vessel full to the brim with stinking water and pus. At the bottom are worms, poisonous snakes and scorpions. Exhausted from swimming about on the surface, the soul sinks to the bottom where it is tortured by the venomous worms. Screaming for pain, the soul regains the surface only to find the vessel surrounded by Dhud Raja's (a *rakshas*) four faithful servants who hit the soul over the head with a huge bludgeon so that it sinks down again to the bottom. Again the worms lay hold of their victim, biting it till it succeeds in escaping once more and rises to the surface. In this manner the soul of a wicked person is tortured in the vessel of wrath. Ultimately, Bhagwan grows tired of torturing the soul and orders its release. After some time the soul enters the body of a baby and begins a new life.

Some Balahis believe that heaven and hell are eternal, and that souls that have once reached either the state of perfect sanctity or complete wickedness have no chance of rebirth, but this belief is not general. Most of the Balahis do not believe in the finality of reward or punishment.

<sup>60</sup>) Tribeni is a town held to be specially holy because the three sacred rivers Ganges, Jumna, and Saraswati, which meet at Allahabad, here once more separate.

## Part IV — Religion

### Chapter XIX

#### Religious Conceptions of the Balahis

##### (1) Balahi Religiosity

It is no easy task to describe adequately the religion of the Balahis. Their present religion is a mixture of remnants from what may have been their own original religion with many kinds and brands of religious practices and beliefs which they, in the course of time, have acquired and assimilated either from the various aboriginal religions prevailing in the country which they inhabited or through which they passed on their migrations; or from the powerful and all-permeating and saturating Hindu religion of their high-caste masters and landlords. These various creeds the Balahis have adopted without any attempt at a logical systematization. Consequently many contradictory tenets and inconsistent practices are held and observed side by side without great mental difficulties.

For instance, the Balahis believe that there is only one God, yet they venerate many gods. Only when pressed to explain this apparent inconsistency do they say that the gods are but the servants and assistants of the one God: Bhagwan. — The Balahis believe in a life after death either in a kind of eternal heaven or hell, but at the same time they profess their belief in *karma* and the transmigration of souls. When this discrepancy is pointed out to them, they say that only those are reborn who are neither perfect saints nor entirely wicked. — Although the Balahis have, in general, quite definite ideas of what is good and right and what is bad and wicked, they often hold that a good end justifies bad means and therefore a morally bad action is justified if it is successful. Besides, sins can easily be washed away by an expiatory sacrifice or a bath in a sacred river. The Balahis often maintain emphatically that religion without sincere devotion and right intention is not the right kind of service of God, yet on the other hand, they are strong ritualists and ascribe magical efficiency to exactly performed rites and prayers. A powerful religious feeling often urges the Balahis to perform an expensive sacrifice, but they never forget to enjoy themselves the main portion of the sacrifice while only scanty parts are actually devoted to the deity. Pilgrimages to sacred shrines are prompted as much by the thought of pleasure or business as by religious sentiment.

Festivals are an important feature of the Balahi religion. They are very frequent and are observed according to the Hindu calendar. Apart from their religious value, they are at the same time enjoyable

social events with a good excuse for abstention from work and the preparation of sumptuous meals. The more important Hindu feasts are rigorously observed and the customary rites performed, though the ordinary Balahi is often very ignorant of the deeper meaning of such feasts and rites.

It is impossible, for the reasons given above, to draw an exact line between religion and magic, and it is equally difficult to state how far particular practices are still observed. The intensity of religious faith and the extent of religious practice vary from Balahi to Balahi, as much as in the various sects of Hinduism to which they belong. Young people generally take little interest in religion and are often very ignorant, but elder people, and in particular the women, are often deeply and sincerely religious. Some of the religious ideas and usages described below are almost universally held by all Balahis, while others are practiced in modified forms in different villages. No Balahi, and no village community, is expected to observe all religious rites and customs which are current among the villagers. The Balahis believe in individualism in religion and allow everybody to live after his own fashion. This individualism which is only too often the result of ignorance and lack of clear religious principles and notions makes the Balahis tolerant and well-intentioned towards other religions. They are convinced that one religion is as good as the other and that no man will fail to attain his eternal destiny who follows the religion of his caste and of his forefathers. They have no inclination to discuss religious questions among themselves or with followers of a different religion, and rarely find cause to quarrel or to disagree on religious grounds and in their anxiety to be on the safe side will worship any foreign deity. Whatever the high castes do, the Balahis imitate unfailingly, and wherever they find the image of a god, they make their obeisance convinced that, if it does not help them, an overdose of piety can certainly do no harm.

The Balahis worship their gods with prayer and sacrifice. In their opinion a prayer without an offering is not very effective; it should always be accompanied by a sacrifice or offering, however small: a coconut, a crum of *gur*, or a lemon, will suffice. But if he really has nothing to offer with his prayer, a Balahi will scratch his finger to make it bleed, and will offer the drops of his blood to the deity.

The Balahis know three kinds of offerings: the petition which is by far the most frequent; the thanksgiving after the petition has been granted; and the expiatory offering. A sacrifice or offering merely for the purpose of honouring the deity, without any selfish motive, is hardly ever performed by a Balahi.

In worshipping the Balahi does not adore the stone or brass image of the god as such, nor does he regard the image of the deity merely as an aid for his imagination, but he believes in a kind of impersonation of the image by the deity at the time of worship. The image is then no more a mere stone or brass figure, but the god himself.

The Balahis, as untouchables, are not permitted to enter Hindu temples or to take an active part in a Hindu worship. They therefore have their own *deo* and *mata* figures, as well as their own *pujari*. Religious-minded people, however, complain that in the last decades religious faith and the influence of religion on moral life have weakened. There is a marked aversion to observing ceremonies which demand a great personal sacrifice from the performers: people are no more prepared to expend great sums on birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies; and pilgrimages, though now more common than before, have largely lost their religious character and have come to be more and more regarded as an entertainment and to be accomplished in comfort. Thus it appears that among the Balahis religious feeling is declining; though the Balahis are more than ever anxious that their religious practice should conform to Hindu usage, they are losing much of their former fervour and true religious spirit<sup>41</sup>).

## (2) Balahi Conversions to Christianity and Islam

According to the Census of India (Central Provinces and Berar, 1931), several thousand Balahis have embraced the Christian religion. For about half a century two Christian Missions have been working in the Nimar for the conversion of the Balahis to Christianity: missionaries of the R. Cath. Church, and of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Both missionary groups who started work among the Balahis about fifty years ago found it at first very difficult to make contact with the shy and timid Balahis. Only the great famine towards the end of the 19th century facilitated access to the Balahis who naturally suffered more severely than others from the pangs of hunger, and consequently took advantage in large numbers of the charity practiced by both missionary institutions. The result of this contact between missionaries and Balahis was the conversion of several thousands of Balahis to the R. Cath. Faith and to Methodism.

<sup>41</sup>) Cf. S. FUCHS: Changes and Developments in the Population of the Nimar District in the Central Provinces of India, *Anthropos* XLI/XLIV, 1946—1949, p. 51.

In the first years of their activity the missionaries of both Churches were confident of converting quickly the whole Balahi caste to Christianity and both Missions competed with one another in enrolling large numbers of Balahis as converts. But the initial hopes were soon disappointed. The movement of the Balahis to Christianity came gradually to a standstill. In 1931 the Census Report<sup>62</sup>) returned only 2517 Balahis as Christians (Catholics and Methodists combined). This number is undoubtedly too low, for the Catholics alone in the Nimar number 8900, and the Methodists 2764 according to their own statistics<sup>63</sup>). The vast majority of both Christian communities consists of Balahis since both Missions work mainly among the Balahis and count only a few members recruited from other communities and castes. The difference in enumeration can partly be explained by the tendency of some Christian Balahis to conceal their Balahi origin and to be returned as 'Indian Christians'. The Census enumerators, on the other hand, generally return all those who profess themselves as Balahis by caste without further inquiry as Hindus by religion. While the number of Christian Balahis, as returned by the Census enumerators, is for the above mentioned reasons too low, the numbers given by the Catholic and the Methodist Missions may be too high. For both Missions claim as Christians all those who are baptized, without discounting those who have ceased to practice their religion and have returned to Hinduism. An impartial study of these facts comes to the result that scarcely 30 per cent of the entire Nimar Balahi population can be called Christian, after almost fifty years of missionary activity.

Not only from the numerical aspect, but also from the point of quality the Balahis are hardly a satisfactory object of missionary activity. The religious standard of the Christian Balahis in the Nimar is, as admitted by the missionaries of both Christian denominations, rather low. The great majority of the Balahi converts are Christians by name only and are, in religious belief and usage, practically Hindus.

The main reason for the poor quality of the Balahi Christians is that their motives for conversion were not purely religious, but mostly social or economic. In the famine years 1897—1900 the Balahis joined the Christian Churches because they expected financial help (which they also got to a large extent). They thought that by baptism they would acquire a right to help and assistance from the "rich and charitable" missionaries, without however intending to give up the practice of their traditional religion. The missionaries, on the

<sup>62</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part II, p. 377. Nagpur 1933.

<sup>63</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, p. 337. Nagpur 1933.

other hand, were at first deceived by the professions of faith and, too busy with gathering-in their rich harvest, neglected to give their converts a solid instruction in the tenets of the Christian religion and to demand from them that change of heart and of their ways of living which a conversion to Christianity implies. Satisfied with the financial help and social protection which they asked for and partly obtained from, the missionaries, the Balahis wanted nothing more. They proved very elusive and stubborn, when at a later date the missionaries tried to bring them up to the standard of full Christians.

Another reason for the difficulties that missionaries experience in the conversion of the Balahis is their strong dependence on the high-caste land-owners and employers. It is natural that the Balahis look up to those who provide them with the means of their livelihood as their social superiors and expect guidance and direction from them in other aspects also. They particularly feel themselves bound to follow their example in religious practice.

No wonder, therefore, that the Christian Missions have made little headway among the Balahis in spite of promising initial successes. During the last ten years few new converts have been made by both Missions. For the missionaries now realise that to increase the numbers of their converts without strong insistence on a sincere inner conviction of the truth of Christianity was a mistake. So far only such Balahis have remained practising Christians as either went through a long training in Christian schools or are economically dependent on the Christian missionary institutions. The present policy of the Methodist missionaries apparently is to select certain families of their old converts for a more intensive training. Their aim is to wean the Methodist Balahis wholly from their traditional ways of life and surroundings and to get them absorbed in the community of the 'Indian Christians' (the so-called *Isai*), a community which in the Nimar is strictly Methodist in creed and rather liberal in regard to social conventions. This method of transplanting the Christianised Balahis into a society so different from their traditional ways of believing and living is naturally not easy, but, in a small way at least, it is quite effective. Moreover, by abandoning their Balahi community, the Balahi Methodists can only improve their social and economic position.

The Catholic missionaries, however, have decided upon a different policy. While trying to keep contact with their numerous nominal followers, they selected certain village communities for a more intensive instruction and training in the ideology of their religion. They have also opened boarding-schools for the education of a number of Balahi children with the prospect of forming through

them a nucleus of well-educated Balahi Christians. But they have no intention to separate their Balahi followers from their Hindu caste-fellows nor from such caste traditions and social conventions as can be brought into concord with the principles of the Catholic religion. Their aim is a gradual saturation of the Balahi community with Catholic beliefs and practices, with insistence at present on only the most essential tenets of their creed. The result of this policy, so far, has not been very promising: The Catholic Balahis have been slow in changing their traditional ideology of life and in adopting Catholic customs and conventions. Though the rich ceremonial of Catholic divine worship appeals to the Balahis, they find it hard to live up to the standard of Catholic morality.

The number of Balahis who have been converted to Islam is very small. Practically only Balahi women who have married Mohammedans have consequently adopted the Mohammedan religion. But these converts have severed all relation with their former caste and cannot anymore be considered as Balahis. They have been completely absorbed by the community which they have joined by marriage.

### (3) Beliefs about the Supreme Being

In the pantheon of the Balahis Bhagwan takes the first place. He is also called Parmatma (Supreme Spirit), Parmeshwar (Supreme God), Ishwar (God), Khuda (name of God, used by the Mohammedans). Bhagwan comes nearest to the concept of God of the monotheistic religions. The Balahis clearly distinguish between Bhagwan and the Hindu minor deities, the *deos* and *matas*. They do not even identify Bhagwan with any of the Hindu Triad Brahma, Beshnu, Mahesh, as they call them. They maintain that these gods are the creatures of Bhagwan, created by him to the end that man may have somebody to whom he can pray when in distress or need of help. For the Balahis believe that Bhagwan himself should not be bothered by man with his trivial troubles, sorrows and desires. To take care of these worldly affairs, man has the gods, who are the servants and *devans* of Bhagwan. Only at times, when all the minor gods are found wanting, may human beings turn to Bhagwan himself and pray to him. At one time when cholera was raging in the Nimar a Balahi said to me: "Now is the hour of Bhagwan. The gods are helpless, so people turn to Bhagwan for help. Sometimes Bhagwan sends such a disease so that we may remember and praise him!"

Then the Balahis pray to Bhagwan in the following manner: "God, thou art the provider, brother! — *Bhagwan, samadneela tu chhe!*" Or they say: "Bhagwan, no one is equal to thee, brother

— *Bhagwan, thara saman koi nei chhe, bhai!*" And they humble themselves before Bhagwan, saying: "We know nothing, brother; but thou knowest everything, brother! — *Haun nei janta, bhai; tu janewalo, bhai!*"<sup>64</sup>).

The Balahis do not identify Bhagwan with the universe or believe, like the Hindus, that the whole universe is one in and with God. They believe that Bhagwan has a distinct personality, is eternal, without a father or mother. An old Balahi who heard some Catholics pray: "Holy Mary, mother of God!", misunderstanding this invocation, objected and said: "How can Bhagwan have a mother?" In a discussion on the genealogy of the gods some Balahis emphatically denied that Bhagwan could be placed into the same category with the other gods who marry and beget children. Of Bhagwan the Balahis say that he is alone: "*Bhagwan akelo chhe!*" Sometimes, however, Bhagwan is indeed identified with a god, with Rama. But when called to attention, the Balahis merely admit that Rama is sometimes addressed as Bhagwan, since he is Bhagwan's incarnation: "*Ram Bhagwan nei chhe, Bhagwan ka avatar chhe!*"

About Bhagwan's attributes the Balahis do not venture to say much. They excuse their ignorance by saying: "We have never seen him! — *Bhagwan hama dekha to nahi!*" But in a vague sense they seem to know that Bhagwan is good, just, holy, and truthful. For the very reason that they are so sure of his goodness and benevolence they omit worshipping him. When I asked Balahis why they never made any offerings to Bhagwan and rarely addressed a prayer in the real sense of the word to him (though his name is ever on their lips as an exclamation or invocation), they replied either that Bhagwan does not want to be bothered by the prayers of man or that it was not necessary to pray and worship him since he is so good! "It is the gods whom we have to worship, else they send us disease and misfortune." The Balahis seem to have no other motive for prayer and worship than to gain some good or to ward off some harm.

The Balahis are not quite certain whether it was Bhagwan who created the world, though they are inclined to believe it: "*Bhagwan ne banaya hoga!*" They are, however, certain that Bhagwan has created the human soul: "The soul is Bhagwan's handiwork! — *Hamsa Bhagwan ki kara chhe!*"

Widespread is the belief that it is Bhagwan who causes the death of a man. When the women mourn the death of a dear relative, they often cry out against Bhagwan and accuse him of cruelty. They

<sup>64</sup>) I could not find any Balahi able to explain to me why the Balahis address Bhagwan with the rather unusual title of 'brother'.

are then scolded by the men and told: "*Bhagwan ko kyon dosh lagauno? Pap to hamne karyo!* — Why do you blame God? It is we who have sinned!"

According to the belief of the Balahis Bhagwan is also the judge of the good and of the bad: "God places the good in a good place, the wicked in a bad place — *Bhagwan ayan log nakha ayan rakhega, bura log nakha kharab jaga dise.*" But generally the Balahis are of the opinion that Bhagwan is too kind to inflict eternal punishment on sinners and believe that after a longer or shorter period of punishment even the wicked will be forgiven and admitted to heaven. Whenever I asked a man or woman where they thought they would go after death, they invariably answered with strong conviction: "To Bhagwan!" or "To Bhagwan's house!"

While it is the general belief of the Balahis, as of other Hindus and aboriginals of the country, that misfortune, disease and death are brought about not by Bhagwan, but by the gods and *matas*, there is one disease which is considered generally as a punishment of Bhagwan for a certain hidden crime: namely, to get worms in wounds. The Balahis do not know for what crime Bhagwan sends this specific disease, but they punish it with expulsion from the caste. Some aboriginal tribes, as the Korkus, believe that worms in wounds are a punishment for the sin of incest. When parents of a child getting worms in wounds are accused of negligence, they reply: "Bhagwan has given him the fruit of his crime. It is not our fault! — *Bhagwanji na wakhi karni ko phal diyo. Yama hamaro kai dosh?*"

An analysis of this concept of Bhagwan of the Balahis shows that Bhagwan is not identical with Brahma or any other Hindu god. The Bhagwan of the Balahis has a distinct personality, is the maker of the gods, of the world and of man, the judge who rewards the good and punishes the wicked. It does not seem that the Balahis have borrowed these beliefs from Hinduism, they do not tally with pantheism and *karma*. As far as the concept of Bhagwan is concerned, the Balahis have more in common with the aboriginal tribes of the Nimar than with the high Hindu castes.

#### (4) The Hindu Deities

Nowhere do the Balahis show as clearly as in the practice of their religion how Hinduized they already are. They celebrate the common Hindu feasts with the same rites as do the Hindus, they believe in Rama, Krishna, and the whole confusing Hindu pantheon, if not with equal understanding, certainly with as strong a fervour as the high-caste Hindus. However, in the worship of the Hindu gods

they show a marked preference for those gods who are feared. The motive of their religious practice is not love of a benign and merciful deity, but fear of the sinister and harmful powers of the superhuman world. Their religion is not that of *bhakti* (devotion) but that of *sakti* (power)<sup>65</sup>. For this reason the higher and more sublime cults of Hinduism are not practiced by the Balahis, nor do they know much of the philosophic and ascetic theories of the old Hindu sages.

### R a m a

Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, is held in high respect and veneration by the Balahis, for he is believed to be an incarnation of Bhagwan himself with whom he is often identified. The stories of the Ramayana which describe Rama as a heroic warrior and devoted husband make a great appeal to the Balahis who listen with rapt attention whenever passages of the Ramayana are recited by wandering minstrels or monks.

But though Rama is so highly esteemed, he is not worshipped by the Balahis, as are other gods of Hinduism. No sacrifices are performed, no offerings made in his honour, nevertheless he is often invoked in distress and sickness, his name is used a hundred times daily when Balahis exchange greetings. The Balahis have no images of Rama, and do not worship in his temples except at the feast of Ramsatra; even then they are only the passive attendants at the ceremonies performed by high-caste Hindus. They often explain this lack of worship by stating that Rama is Bhagwan who is beyond the reach of human supplication and should not be troubled with the trivial affairs of man. But this explanation is little satisfactory; most probably they do not worship Rama because they have no ritual of their own for his worship, since he is a deity borrowed from the Hindus who, on the other hand, do not allow Balahis to take an active part in their ceremonies in honour of Rama.

### K r i s h n a

By the recital of the stories from the Premsagar (Sea of Love), the Balahis know almost as much of Krishna as they do of Rama. But the Krishna of the Premsagar, the Krishna they know, is more the adventurous knight who fights the demons, and the capricious lover of the Gopis (milkmaids), than the philosophic and ascetic mentor of Arjun as he appears in the Bhagavadgita.

<sup>65</sup>) Cf. S. FUCHS: The Matriarchal Elements of the Nimar Balahis. New Indian Antiquary, Poona 1942, Vol. V, Nos 4—5, p. 11.

Krishna is worshipped on certain feast-days, according to the Hindu calendar. But the Balahis have no images of the god for veneration, and do not pray to him in distress, as they do to Rama. Balahis do not worship in temples dedicated to Krishna.

### Mahadeo

Mahadeo is one of the main deities of the Balahis and his assistance is invoked in all the more important affairs of a Balahi's life. The symbol of Mahadeo, the *lingam*, is found and worshipped almost in every village, just in front, or at the side, of the image of Hanuman. A crude representation of his sacred animal, the bull Nandi, is usually placed before the *lingam*.

The ritual proper to his worship is not as simple and informative as that of the village god Hanuman; he is venerated on special occasions and by an elaborate ritual. Pilgrimages are also made to those shrines where the god has manifested his power or favour. The most popular of Mahadeo's shrines which many Balahis visit almost yearly is at Mandhata on the Nerbudda. At Pachmarhi in the Satpura hills and close to Burhanpur are other shrines of Mahadeo, favoured by the Balahis.

Some Balahis believe that Mahadeo created the world of his sweat. Once when perspiring he rubbed his skin and from the dirt he made the world. Some also believe that the crow played a role in the creation of the world, but about this they are not quite sure. Creation myths in which Mahadeo plays an important role are current among several of the aboriginal tribes in the Nimar, and of these the Balahis must have heard now and then.

The Balahis believe that Bhagwan created Mahadeo for mankind to worship. There is no doubt that Mahadeo is the Hinduized version of a more primitive deity: The name Mahadeo (Shiva) evidently hides an old fertility god of the Balahis.

The rich and varied ritual of his worship will be described in the following chapters.

### Ganesh

Ganesh or Ganpati is the son of Shiva and Parvati. He is represented by the figure of a child or a short, fat man with an elephant's head, usually in a sitting posture and a round belly. Following the example of the high-caste Hindus, the Balahis worship him as the god of good luck at the commencement of all important undertakings, especially before a wedding or funeral feast. His portrait, a huge print in glaring colours, is bought in the bazaar and hung over the door of a house where a wedding is about to take place. Many Balahi songs begin with a verse in praise of the god.

### H a n u m a n

The tutelary deity of the Balahi villages is Hanuman, the monkey god. The exploits of this great helper and friend of Rama in his search for Sita are familiar and popular topics to all Balahis. Hanuman is represented in every village of the district by a more or less crudely shaped stone figure of a monkey, painted all over with vermillion. Often a red rag is tied around his waist, as a loin-cloth. The face is always turned southward, towards Lanka (Ceylon), the scene of his heroic deeds.

Monkeys are sacred to Hanuman, and must not be killed; however great a nuisance they are to the farmers and whatever harm they do to the crops, they must only be chased away. Occasionally they should be fed, as an act of worship for Hanuman. The Balahis find nothing strange in worshipping a monkey. They do not make the same differentiation between man and an animal, as a westerner would, and consider the monkey as a member of a sacred caste.

As the Balahis are not allowed to make offerings with the other villagers on the platform where the image stands, they have often a Hanuman of their own, either in their own quarter or near the village shrine. The shrine of Hanuman is erected before a village is established, so it is he who starts the foundation of a new village.

Occasionally Hanuman receives an offering of the crop of the season: a handful of cotton, *foari* or wheat, pumpkins, or flowers. When field-labourers pass his shrine as they come from the fields, they often make a small offering from the day's earnings.

On special occasions, on feast days, a more solemn offering is made. A fire is lighted and *ghi* is poured on the flames in honour of the monkey god.

### O t h e r D e i t i e s

Besides the above mentioned *deos* the Balahis venerate other deities, such as Bhirad, god of snakes (worshipped on Nang-panchmi); Bhairam, an incarnation of Shiva, the god of cattle (he is worshipped on Pola); Maisasur, god of water buffaloes; and many other deities of the Hindu pantheon or of the aborigines of the district.

### K a b i r

Among the incarnations of Bhagwan whom the Balahis venerate there is the weaver-saint Kabir. The Balahis regard him as the spiritual teacher (*mahaguru*) of their caste, and believe that Bhagwan assumed the body of Kabir to teach mankind the right principles of life. However, Kabir is not worshipped by the Balahis, and no

offerings are made in his name. His influence is enormous; and his widely popular songs and apophthegms are quoted by low and high in all contingencies of life. For his pithy and forceful sayings appeal to the common people; they are expressed in the vernacular and use the incidents of every-day life to illustrate the wisdom of Kabir's teachings which are thus easily understood by the uneducated and need no interpretation by *pundits*.

Kabir appeals so much to the Balahis, because he was one of their own social environment. Though many wondrous legends have grown up around this remarkable sage and saint, there is no doubt as to his humble origin. Kabir was a weaver, an outcaste, though a disciple of the great Ramchandra. It is not clear whether he was a Hindu or Mohammedan. In his teachings he tried to reconcile Hinduism and Islam by making light of exaggerated dogmatism and ritualism, and pointing at the fundamental importance of real faith, and sincere devotion to the living God. He exposed the arrogance and hypocrisy of the Brahmans, and fought for the abolition of caste and religious distinctions. He condemned idol worship and brought strong Mohammedan elements into the theistic movement of his age.

All this should have made the Balahis fervent followers of Kabir. But it seems that the influence of their Hindu environment proved too strong. Some stray Balahi *sadhus* and *gurus* still follow Kabir, even when this means divergence from Hinduism, but the great mass of the Balahis, their *sadhus* and Brahmans not excepted, practice the ordinary Hindu religion though one and all profess to be adherents of Kabir. This inconsistency does not disturb the peace of mind of the Balahis; they quote Kabir freely and frequently whenever the occasion warrants, but conveniently by-pass his teachings when practical life seems to demand a closer following of Hinduism.

## Chapter XX

### The Clan Gods and Their Worship

#### (1) The Divine Ancestor of the Caste. Mythical Origin of the Balahis

Balahi religion, as so far recounted, clearly shows that the Balahis are already largely Hinduised. The process of Hinduisation must have started centuries ago and continued progressively. Only thus can we explain the very scanty remnants of the original Balahi religion. While other castes and tribes are rich in ancient myths and traditions, the Balahis know little of their original history and religion. When asked about their old religion and about the origin

of the world or their own caste, they usually repeat the popular Hindu myths and speak of religious conceptions and customs which are obviously of Hindu origin.

However, one Balahi, a *bhat* called Kushial Rao, of the clan Hanumantya, a resident of Tigris near Khandwa, read from his clan register which is very old and goes back several hundred years a story explaining the creation of the world and the origin of the Balahi caste. If the records are authentic, they cover a period of about 800 years. The clan register begins with the narration of the origin of the world and the circumstances of the birth of the first Balahi. Then it relates the origin of the different Balahi clans and the succession of generations from the founder and ancestor down to the last generation, together with the name of the clan gods and the ritual of their worship. Other Balahis, it is true, have a rather vague idea of the contents of the *bhat's* book; many of them admit that they no longer worship their clan gods in the manner prescribed by old Balahi tradition. They excuse their negligence by saying that they were afraid of making mistakes in the performance of the ritual and came to omit it rather than lay themselves open to the wrath of these clan-gods who might punish them for any omission or fault in the performance of these rites.

#### Balahi Version of the Creation Myth

In the beginning there was nothing but water; and over the water floated a spirit, in the form of a huge ball. In this ball there was life. Out of this ball came *Purush*, the first man; he is also called *Adam* (*admi*). After him came *Ajar* and *Niran-jan*. Out of the water the light (*iyot*) was born, and out of the light: *Sakti*. *Sakti* was a woman and wanted *Purush* for husband. But *Purush* told her: "Rub your hands." *Sakti* did so and got three blisters on her palms. *Purush* said to her: "Open a blister." She did so, and out of the blister came a man. *Purush* told her: "This is your husband." *Sakti* said to the man born of her blister: "Take my hand." But he would not, calling her mother. *Sakti* called him *Adam* (*admi* — man). *Sakti* opened the second blister on her hand, again a man came out. She said to him: "Take my hand." But he would not marry her, and he too called her mother. *Sakti* gave him the name *Bhagwant* (*Vishnu*). When *Sakti* opened the third and last blister, a third man came out whom she called *Sambhu* (*Shankar*). To him she said: "You are my husband. Take me as your wife." But *Sambhu* replied: "You are my mother. How can I marry you?" *Sakti* said: "Out of the three blisters on my hand came three men. But these three men are my sons. How shall I get a husband; must I remain for ever

without a man?" Sambhu, her son, told her: "Go to Kashi (Benares), there you will get a husband."

Then Sambhu took the form of a spirit and started on a pilgrimage to Kashi. Sakti followed him, in search of a husband. But Sambhu knew that she followed him and that she really intended to marry him. So he created ninety-nine forms of himself and hid himself amongst them. Likewise Sakti divided herself into a hundred forms. The hundred forms of Sakti embraced the forms of Sambhu, but she found only his ninety-nine empty forms, the real Sambhu she could not catch. Then Sakti said: "What shall I do? These bodies are all lifeless." So she decided to go home, and at once the hundred forms of Sambhu were again made one with Sambhu. But Sambhu felt polluted because his own mother wanted to lie with him and he went to bathe and so purify himself. As he approached the river, Sakti saw him coming. Filled with desire she turned herself into a lump of gold on the road, thinking that Sambhu would pick up the gold, and thus she would be his. But when Sambhu saw the gold, he thought: "What is this lump of gold? It is Sakti! She tries to deceive me!" And he said: "Mother, I am your son. How can I marry you?" He left the lump of gold lying on the road and went his way. Sakti turned herself back into Sakti, made a detour, reached the path before Sambhu and turned herself into a lump of silver. Again Sambhu recognised her and left the lump of silver untouched. Again Sakti made a detour and reached the road before Sambhu. This time she turned into mud, saying to herself: "Sambhu is a *sadhu* and will paint his body with dust, thus will he touch me." But Sambhu was not to be deceived and did not touch the mud. Now Sakti turned into a flat stone and said: "Sambhu will sit down on me." But Sambhu did do no such thing. Again Sakti went ahead and took the form of a stick, saying: "Sambhu is tired, he will pick me up and use me as a walking stick." Again Sambhu recognised her and exclaimed: "She will never give me up!" He sighed and stopped before Sakti, saying: "Let it be. Why do you turn into gold, silver, mud, a stone, and a stick? I am your son. How can I become your husband? I will burn to death if you do not go away. Let me go in peace."

Sakti folded her hands and replied: "Sambhu, I will give you peace, but first give me a present." Sambhu said: "I will give you a foetus of five months in your womb, five months old because you took five different forms to deceive me."

Sakti went back to Purush and cried: "This man calls me mother, he will not marry me!" Purush got very angry and replied: "If he does not want to become your husband, am I to marry you? You shall die!" But Sakti said: "How can I die? I have a child in

my womb." Purush told her: "Lie down on the ground." Sakti did so and a boy was born of the five months' foetus. Sakti died; Sambhu adopted the boy and promised to care for him. The boy's name was Haribans, he was the first Balahi. His mother was dead, he had no father, a child of a five months' foetus! He is mud and the fruit of mud: *dher, jamin ka per*. Haribans, the first Balahi, married the daughter of Julahiya, a devotee of Sambhu. The Balahis know nothing of the origin of Julahiya, but some say that he was a son of Sambhu. Others say that this is impossible as Haribans could not have married a daughter of a son of Sambhu<sup>66</sup>).

Haribans begot many children who all married and begot children. One of Haribans' offspring was Ganga, another Sanga. Both were weavers. At that time the children of Haribans lived near Delhi, the capital of the Moguls. The Moguls were very strict and many people, including Balahis, were put to jail. Now Ganga thought of a way to deliver his caste-fellows from the jail.

He sat down at his weaving loom and wove a cloth five *hath* (cubits) long. In the cloth he wove the Maharaja's portrait, his kingdom, palace, court, garden, his horses, camels and elephants. When he had finished his wonderful cloth, he went to the Maharaja whose name was Vasya and offered him the cloth as a present. The Maharaja was overjoyed and exclaimed: "Wonderful! Whatever you want for this beautiful cloth, I shall give you!" Ganga replied: "Promise me that!" The Maharaja gave his solemn promise that he would fulfil any wish of the weaver.

Whereupon Ganga said: "Maharaja, open your jail and set all Balahis free. The Maharaja replied: "Your wish is granted. Whom-ever you recognise as a Balahi, he is free." Ganga thought: "How can I make out all my caste-fellows? I know what I shall do!" Then he took a bottle of country-liquor and a piece of cow's meat and went to the jail. He shouted: "My caste-brothers, fellow-Balahis, eat of the cow's meat and drink liquor. You are free!" The Balahis ate and drank and so left the jail. When the men of other castes saw the Balahis leave the prison, they said: "How long are we to remain in this jail? We too will eat cow's meat and drink liquor and be free." And they too ate cow's meat and drank liquor and were freed.

## (2) The Clan Gods and Their Worship

After the liberation of the Balahis from the jail and the great increase of their numbers, Ganga decided to emigrate with his people to another country. We do not know the exact reasons for this emigration, but it is probable that he did not trust the Maharaja,

<sup>66</sup>) Similar stories of the creation are common in popular Hinduism.

or that the high-caste people newly included among the Balahis did not want to meet their relatives and former caste-fellows after joining these out-castes and untouchables. Tradition relates that Ganga took his people to Ujjain, the old capital of Malwa. There the Balahis settled down. From here they spread all over the Malwa plateau and southwards as far as the Nimar.

Ganga now took the organisation of the caste in hand and appointed a registrar (*bhat*) of the clan Hanumantya. The *bhat* was ordered to write down each man's name, his clan and his original caste. He was also told to register the name of each man's clan gods and the ritual of their worship, and the taboos and peculiarities of each clan.

Ganga's own clan was called *Bandi chhor kochla* (the liberator). The clan's ancestor is Haribans. The clan deity is Chawanda (another name of Kali). Chawanda is worshipped by every family of this clan on the ninth day in the month of Kuar. The ritual of worship is as follows: The house is cleaned and smeared with cattle dung. Then rice is ground and mixed with water to a paste. The head of the family dips his hand into the paste and then, with fingers wide-spread, presses his palm once on the inner wall of his house at a spot near the hearth fire. Then he pours water on wheat flour and kneads it to a dough. He forms a ball with a hole in the middle into which he pours oil. A cotton thread is dipped in the oil and lighted. This lamp, called *diya*, is placed under the hand print on the wall. Now all the members of the family are called in and a goat, pure white or pure black, with neither spots nor patches of colour, is sacrificed before the hand-print. Its head is cut off, then it is skinned, cut up and the meat boiled in a huge pot. The skin, the bones and everything which cannot be eaten, is carefully buried in the ground under the hand-print. Of the sacrificial meal only members of the clan may partake, the married daughters of the family are not allowed to share the meat, for by their marriage they have been adopted by another clan. Whatever remains over of this meat, is buried under the floor, nothing is thrown away or given to members of other clans.

The women of the Kochla clan are prohibited from wearing a neck ornament which is called *garsali*, and toe-rings with five points (*gaur ke bichhe*). Members of this clan are not allowed to buy children's toys with small tinkling bells, the so-called *ghunghru*. But if members of other clans buy such toys and present them to children of the Kochla clan, they are permitted to accept them. If a woman of the clan wants a golden nose-ring, she may not buy it herself, before she has begged a few coins from other Balahis which she then adds to the money ear-marked for the purchase of a nose-

ring. Women of the Kochla clan are forbidden to mould a clay *chulha* (hearth). They must ask another Balahi to build a clay hearth for them. No woman of the Kochla clan is allowed to wear a piece of cloth of yellow colour, even a yellow-coloured hem on a *sari* (scarf) or *dhoti* (loincloth) is prohibited.

The reason for these prohibitions is, in the opinion of the Balahis, that the clan-goddess, Chawanda, wears a *lagra* of yellow cloth, a golden nose-ring, toe-rings with five points, and *ghunghrus* at her ankles. The Balahis also believe that Chawanda *mata* is none less than Sakti *mata*, the mother of Haribans, the first Balahi. There exists no image in brass or stone of the goddess. She is not worshipped at any other time but on the ninth day of the month of Kuar. However, the members of the Kochla clan admit that nowadays they often omit the worship of their clan-mother even on her feast-day and that they no more observe their clan-rules as strictly as their fore-fathers used to do.

(2) The second clan which claims descent from the original ancestor of the caste, Haribans, is called *Masanya*. The Masanya worship as their clan *mata* Chawanda *devi*, and as their clan *deo* Masan, the god of the graveyard. It is the privilege of the members of this clan to collect the clothes which are taken off a corpse on the burial-ground or at the burning *ghat* and thrown away. The Masanya wear such garments without harm to themselves while other Balahis would fear the revenge of the spirits of the deceased were they to wear such clothes. When a member of this clan is married, his relatives erect a diminutive marriage booth (*mandap*) on the graveyard. The *mandap* is about half a foot high, its roof is covered with wheat bread which the children, or crows, remove and eat. Only then the real wedding booth is built before the house where the marriage will take place.

It appears that the members of the clan come from the Holkar State; their original village is Dupapal.

(3) Another Balahi clan is *Bhorgargya*. The clan-goddess of the Bhorgargya is, again, Chawanda *mata*. She is worshipped in the month of Chhait by the sacrifice of a goat and the burning of the nine *diyas* prepared of wheat-flour under a hand-print on the wall of the main room.

It is believed that the members of this clan were formerly settled at Kothi, a village in Holkar State.

It is maintained that almost all male members of the clan grow bald, as soon as they reach middle age.

(4) The members of the *Tirklya* clan also worship Chawanda *mata* as their clan-goddess in the month of Chhait. Their original home-village is Farrabad.

(5) The *Maherparbat* clan comes from Laheku. The clan members worship *Renka mata*. The offering consists of a goat, seven *diyas* made of a mixture of wheat and *mahua* flour, and two four-anna coins in silver which are offered in a coconut.

*Renka mata* is another name for *Sakti mata*, so the Balahis say. There is a temple of a *Renuka devi* at Mahur in Hyderabad State, but nothing definite is known of the *mata*.

The Bhils of Central India have a clan with a similar name: Meheda, pronounced: *Mehera*, who worship the *bahera* (Beleris myrobalan) tree, whence they are said to have got their name<sup>67</sup>).

It is possible that the Balahis of this clan have got their name from the same tree. It is not known whether they venerate any tree.

(6) The *Bhalray* clan hails from Bhiloro and also worships *Renka mata* with an offering of nine *diyas* and the sacrifice of a goat. The *diyas* must consist of a dough of gram (*chana*), *chhira* (milk) and wheat flour. In the *diyas* sweet oil or *ghi* is burned, never kerosene oil.

(7) The *Bhagorya* clan's original home was Sagurbhagur in Holkar State. The members of the clan venerate as their clan-goddess *Bhagoti mata*. On the day of the annual worship 24 cakes (*puri*) of rice, with *ghi*, sugar, and a coconut are offered to the *mata*, but only one *diya* is lighted. No goat is sacrificed.

(8) The *Bansaria* clan hails from Manihar. The *Bansarya* worship *Renka mata* as their special goddess with an offering of nine cakes and *diyas*, consisting of a mixture of gram, wheat, and *mahua* flour. Instead of a goat, a white cock is sacrificed.

(9) The *Bhomarya* clan is called after the village Bhomara (near Sanawad in Holkar State). They worship as their clan *mata* Sati (a woman who burnt herself on the pyre of her deceased husband). The members of the clan offer seven *diyas* of wheat flour, and as many cakes of a mixture of gram (*chane ki dal*) and *bhajya* (vegetables). Neither a goat nor a cock is sacrificed.

(10) The *Panthubor* clan's original home village is Samar-patho. When the ancestor of this clan came, as ordered by Ganga, to the *bhat* to have his name registered he was eating a *bor* fruit (*Zizyphus jujuba*). The *bhat* therefore called his clan *Panthubor*. The members of this clan worship *Bhagoti mata* as their special *devi*; on the day of worship they offer her a *lagra*, a coconut, nine wheat cakes and two *diyas* of wheat flour, also such spices as *singara*, *badam*, *kharik*, *laung*, *ilaichi*. No goat or cock is sacrificed in honour of the *mata*.

<sup>67</sup>) C. E. LUARD: Census of India 1901, vol. I: Ethnographic appendices, p. 163. Calcutta 1903.

(11) The *Chakarkhunya* clan's home is at Gauli (in Holkar State). The clan worships Chawanda *mata*. Originally a human sacrifice was performed by the clan members on the annual day of worship. The victim was a virgin boy of no particular caste. Since it became too dangerous to kidnap children for such sacrifices, the clan members ceased altogether to perform any ceremony for the clan *mata*. Not even a *diya* is burnt nor a cake offered, as is customary among other clans.

(12) The *Salwya*, also called *Chil-salwya*, come from Jinar in Rajputana and worship Dugai Mata. They sacrifice to their *devi* a he-goat, a cock, 14 wheat cakes and as many *diyas* of wheat dough, also blood drops from the finger (*ungli ka rakt*), vermilion (*sendhur ka tika*), and seven *kajoli* fruits (called *guja* or *sowale*, hence the name of the clan *Salwya*!).

(13) The Balahi clan *Nirel* comes originally from Wagdo. The clan members worship Renka *mata* on the 14 th day of Chhait. While no goat is sacrificed, the offering consists of 14 cakes of a mixture of wheat, *mahua*, gram flour, of *chhira*, and rice.

On the day of worship the members of the clan must go to fourteen Balahi houses and beg. Whatever they receive is poured into the fourteen cakes which are offered to the clan-goddess. The strange custom of begging on the day of worship suggests that members of the *Nirel* clan were formerly devotees of Renuka *mata* and attached to a temple<sup>68</sup>).

It is perhaps more than coincidence that many Balahi clans worship, like the Gondhalis, Renka *mata* and Tukai *mata* (whom the Balahis call Dugai), that many Balahis are musicians who are engaged for weddings and funerals, that the Balahi dancers wear the same white or red robe and a red turban, as the Gondhalis. If the members of the *Nirel* clan go a-begging on the day of worship

<sup>68</sup>) Similar customs are still practiced by the Gondhali, a caste or order of wandering beggars and musicians found in the Maratha Districts of the C. P. and Berar. The origin of the caste is obscure but it appears to have been recruited in recent times from the offspring of Waghyas and Murlis or male and female children devoted to temples by their parents in fulfilment of a vow. Mr. Kitts states in the Berar Census Report 1881 that the Gondhalis are attached either to the temple of Tukai at Tuljapur or the temple of Renuka at Mahur and in consequence form two subcastes...

...The goddess Bhawani or *devi* is especially revered by the caste... The Gondhalis are mendicant musicians, and are engaged on the occasion of marriages...

The caste beg between dawn and noon, wearing a long white or red robe and a red turban folded from twisted strings of cloth like the Marathas. (Russell: op. cit. vol. III, p. 143—147.)

of their clan-goddess, begging must formerly have been a privilege or habit of their clan.

(14) The *Mohiya* clan of the Balahis is at home in Ghatarkheri, south-west of Khandwa. Renka *devi* is the goddess of the clan.

The members of the clan are prohibited from baking their bread on an iron pan, they use instead earthen pans. Such bread is called *khaira ka roti*. The Mohiya clan members offer to their *mata* rice mixed with milk, sugar, and such spices as *laung*, *supari*, *ilaichi*, *kharik*, *badam*, *singora*, and a coconut. No salt should be added to the ingredients of the offering.

(15) The *Sankpal* clan comes from Sendhwa in Holkar State, and worships Husai *mata* as clan goddess. Their offering consists of rice cakes with an addition of milk and *ghi* and sugar, and a coconut. Seven cakes and seven *diyas* of a mixture of coarsely ground wheat, *mahua* and gram flour are also offered.

(16) The *Gathya* clan's original home is Khedaru. The clan members are supposed to worship Chawanda *mata* yearly on the 14th day of Chhait. A paste is made of a mixture of rice and *haldi*; the head of the family dips his hand into the mixture and presses it against the wall of the main room. Before that handprint *khir*<sup>69</sup> is offered. The offering is served not on a tray (*arti*) as is usual, but on a winnowing fan. A goat is killed in honour of the clan-*mata*, and an offering made of nine cakes, along with *gur* and *ghi*, five *laung*, five *kharik*, five *badam*, five *ilaichi ki doda*, and five *singora*.

(17) The *Kharorya* clan is at home in Kutdhul, the *mata* of the clan is called Husai *devi*. She is worshipped every second year on the ninth day after Dasahra. The members of the clan go and beg from seven Balahi houses, the gifts which they receive are added to the cakes of wheat, gram, and *mahua* flour, which are offered to the *mata*. A cock and a small chicken are sacrificed, and a *kharik* fruit offered.

(18) The *Muharya* clan hails from Mordhana (probably Mardana, 10 miles from Mandleshwar in the Kasrawad Pargana of Holkar State). The clan members worship Renka *mata* on the ninth day after Dasahra. After having made one hand-print on the wall, they paint it with a mixture of *kuku* and boiled rice. They sacrifice to the *mata* a goat, a black cock, fourteen cakes, a *tika*, a sacred thread, a *singara* of black colour, and also a black *lagra* and other ornaments of black colour.

The women of the clan are prohibited from wearing clothes of black colour, for their clan-deity is supposed to be clad in black garments.

<sup>69</sup>) Rice, boiled in milk and sugar, but without salt.

(19) The *Ekkal* clan is at home in Rolgaon near Harda. The clan worships *Rasain mata* on the 14th day of Chhait. A hand-print is made on the wall, with a mixture of boiled rice and vermillion. Fourteen cakes of wheat and gram flour are offered and fourteen *diyas* burned.

(20) The *Khandgur* clan is also called *Khankhul*. The clan is at home in Handia (on the Nerbudda). The clan members worship *Renka mata* in the month of Mangsi. No hand print is made on the wall. The offering consists of a coconut, *khir*, five *diyas* on five cakes and twenty-four other cakes. The offering is made early in the morning, the clan members must be dressed in white garments during the ceremony.

*Renka mata*, their clan goddess, is worshipped at Mathui. The members of this clan (as all other clans which worship *Renka mata*) are prohibited from cutting an Astra tree, and from burning its wood. They are not permitted to kill a snake, or to use a broom. Clothes of yellow colour and golden ornaments they may not wear. Clan members may not purchase bullock-bells, nor toys or toe-rings. They cannot use bed-steads on four legs, thus their beds are suspended from the ceiling or the roof beams of their houses.

(21) The *Chiraktya* clan hails from Borut (probably Barud, six miles from Khargone in Holkar State). The clan worships *Dugai mata* in the month of Mangsi. 25 cakes (in five piles of five cakes each, on top of which a *diya* is lighted) are offered to the *devi*, with *gulal*, *abir*, *kuku*, *misi*, *panchkoka*, and a coconut.

(22) The *Damudrya* clan was originally at home in Jethwan (Jethawaya) near Barwaha in Holkar State. The clan members worship *Chawanda mata* in the month of Chhait. Fruits of the Chandan tree are ground to flour and mixed with water. The head of the family dips his hand in the mixture and makes a hand-print on the wall. Under this hand-print the clan members offer *khir*, nine cakes (of wheat flour), and five *diyas*, also *panchkoka* and a coconut. A he-goat is sacrificed.

(23) The *Sorankhi* clan hails from Anjrud (near Unkarji-Man-dhata). The clan goddess is Diwai or Siwai *mata*. In her honour a white sheet (*singara*) is spread on the floor in the main room of the house, and an offering is made of a coconut, and on a plate are put *khir* as well as a silver coin and a *diya* of *ghi*. But no goat is sacrificed.

(24) The *Bharsakhar* clan, from Selanandri (Holkar State) worships *Amja* (or *Limja*) *mata* on the 14th day of Chhait. Eighteen wheat cakes and as many *diyas* are offered as well as a coconut, and *khir*.

(25) The *Wardya* clan comes from Raghoti, and worships Chawanda *mata*. A white he-goat and a black chicken are sacrificed, and an offering is made of nine hair-tresses (*aṭi*), nine *tikas* (star-like ornament of the fore-head), nine armlets (*bangli*), nine *poths* (neck-ornament of pearls), and forty-five cakes in nine piles of five cakes each. On each pile is put a *diya*.

(26) The *Koga* clan's original home village is Chameri. The clan members worship Markai *mata* every second year on the 14th day of Chhait. A black he-goat is sacrificed, and an offering is made of a coconut, fourteen cakes of a mixture of wheat, *mahua*, and gram flour, and as many *diyas* are lighted.

(27) The *Ganglya* clan hails from Khargone in Holkar State. The clan members worship Rasain *mata*, and make an offering of 10 pounds of wheat flour and gram, five piles of bread crumbs (21 pieces of bread in each pile), with a *diya* on top of each pile. Five piles of *panchkoka* (consisting of *badam*, *laung*, *ilaichi*, *supari*, *kharik* and *pan*) are offered. *Khīr* is poured into the sacrificial fire.

All clan members partake of the sacrificial meal. Whatever remains over is buried in the floor of the house.

(28) The *Baghmar* clan's village is Kalpat. The clan name originated apparently from a tiger-killing ancestor (Baghmar clans are found also in the Dhoba, Chamar and Dhimar castes). The clan members worship Dugai *mata* with a yearly sacrifice of a he-goat, and an offering of a coconut, five cakes of mixed wheat, *mahua*, and gram flour, and, on a plate of white enamel, five *suparis* (betelnut), five *diyas* with five wicks which are lighted.

(29) The *Singphalya* clan (from Upras) worships Renka *mata* in the month of Chhait. A black he-goat is sacrificed to the *devi*, under a hand-print made with a mixture of rice-water and vermilion. The offering consists of fourteen *puris* of a mixture of wheat, *mahua*, and gram flour, with *chhira*. A black cock is sacrificed to Bhairu *deo*.

(30) The *Mahya* clan (from Rajora) worships Chawanda *mata*; under the hand-print on the wall a black he-goat is sacrificed, together with an offering of five piles of nine cakes each, five *diyas* and *khīr*. A coconut too is offered.

(31) The *Gaulya* clan comes from Sukrai and worships Chawanda *mata*. A plate, containing gram, two pounds of wheat, a *pan*, a cake, and a *diya*, is moved up and down before the hand-print on the wall. No goat is sacrificed.

It is noteworthy that the Bhils too have a clan named Gaolia, after the creeper *gaola* (C. E. LUARD: op. cit. p. 162).

(32) The *Chichla* clan (from Vosalai near Khargone) worships Sodra *mata*. An offering is made to the *mata* of seven *puris* of mixed

wheat and gram flour, *gur*, and *mahua* fruits. Only one *diya* is burned in honour of the goddess.

(33) The *Gaikiwar* clan is at home in Tukathal (near Dhertalai in Berar). The clan members worship Bhagoti *mata* with an offering of seven *suware* (*puranpuri*), seven *icare* (of *urad* pulse), nine wheat cakes, two *diyas*, a coconut, a *supari*, and a double *paisa* (6 *pais*).

(34) The *Auchat* clan (from Ajjanti, north of Khandwa) worships Chawanda *mata* on the 9th day after Dasahra. An offering is made every year of nine cakes and nine *diyas* in which oil is burned. Alternatively a black he-goat or a white buffalo calf (*bhoria kola*) is sacrificed with an offering of twenty-one *puris*, twenty-one bread cakes and five *diyas* in which ghi is burned. The sacrifice is performed in the house.

(35) The *Atutya* clan (from Chhorai near Khargone) worships Unkar Manekar, a male deity (Mahadeo); but no *mata*. In the month of Chhait the members of this clan go and beg from nine Balahi houses. Whatever they receive, is mixed with the bread which is offered in nine piles of nine cakes each. Two *dipaks* (lamps) are lighted.

(36) The *Wankara* clan comes from Methaul (Holkar State). The offering to the clan-goddess Renka *mata* consists of a coconut, *khir*, 18 bread cakes, two *diyas*, and 18 *puris* of wheat, gram, and *mahua* flour.

(37) The *Ningwal* clan from Tupapahar (near Burhanpur) worships Siwai (or Diwai) *mata* on *Dasahra naumi* (9th day after Dasahra). The offering consists of five piles of nine *puris* each, two *diyas* are placed on each of four piles of cakes, one *diya* only on the fifth pile.

The Bhils<sup>79</sup>) too have a clan Ningwal, named after the god Ningwal who is said to live under the *tml*i tree (*Tamarindus indica*) or under the *thuwar* shrub (*Euphorbia carinata*).

The Balahi *bhat* maintains that the above mentioned clans are genuine Balahi clans. The ancestors of these clans are descended from Haribans, the mythical founder of the caste.

The following clans claim descent from one of the high-caste prisoners who escaped from the jail by turning Balahi in the time of Ganga, or other high-caste men who in the course of time were out-casted by their caste-fellows and joined the Balahi community.

(1) One of the prisoners who followed Ganga, the Balahi, was a Rajput of the city of Chorai. His clan name was *Hirwa*. The members

<sup>79</sup>) C. E. LUARD: op. cit. p. 163.

of this clan worship Ghognath *deo* as their clan god and Gubrai (which means: the owl) as their clan *mata*.

At Dasahra and on the fourteenth day of the month of Chhait an offering is performed in honour of Gubrai *mata*. Before the sacrifice takes place, all clan members bathe and change their clothes. The whole house is cleaned and its walls coated with fresh cattle-dung. All dirty clothes and blankets are removed from the house and the rooms sprinkled with cow's urine.

Then all clan members await an owl-call. The Balahis claim that hitherto the Hirwa clansmen have never waited in vain for owl call on this particular day. As soon as the owl is heard the offering is made in the same manner as in the Kochla clan: a hand-print is made on the wall, and before this hand-print wheat cakes are offered and lamps lighted.

The worship of the owl is based on an event which tradition relates as follows: Once a Rajput farmer and his wife went to their field to sow. The woman who had a small baby took it with her and laid it on the ground near their place of work. In the evening the woman returned to prepare the dinner and left her baby in the field thinking that her husband would bring it home. When her husband finished his work, he too went home without it, thinking that his wife had taken it home. When it was discovered that the child had been left in the field, a prey to wild animals, husband and wife ran back to their field, greatly fearing that their child had been killed by a straying animal. They were overjoyed to find the child unharmed and protected by an owl.

The owl returned the child to its mother, but requested in return the woman's bodice (*choli*). This event is supposed to have happened near Choli Maheshwar, a village in the Nerbudda valley which is still in existence.

Since that time the farmer, and after his death his sons and their descendants, have worshipped Gubrai *mata* as their clan goddess. The women of the clan are not allowed to purchase bodices for their own use. They believe that any woman of the clan who bought a bodice for herself, would get a sickness of the breast. The Hirwa women consequently only wear bodices which have been purchased by women of other clans and presented to them as a gift. Members of the clan are not allowed to kill an owl. On the day of worship of the clan *mata* the Hirwa clansmen often invite the *bhat* to bring his register in which the Balahi clans are noted down. They worship the clan register, and afterwards invite the *bhat* to a meal which is specially prepared for him, for he cannot be invited to partake of the sacrificial meal which later on all the clan members will take.

(2) Another Rajput who had turned Balahi at the time of Ganga was the ancestor of the clan *Kanerya*, so called because his home village was Kanaurgarh. This clan worships Chhappan *deo* as clan god, and Dugai *mata* as clan goddess.

Chhappan *deo* is worshipped on the wedding day of a boy of the clan. The sacrifice of a goat is performed at the centre post of the marriage booth before the image of Chhappan *deo*. The *pujari* (offering priest) is a respected member of the clan in whose keeping is the image of the god. At present the image of the god is in possession of the *kotwal* (village watchman) of Pandhana who takes it to every clan member's marriage. This figure of Chhappan *deo* represents the god in human form riding on a bull (probably Shiva on the bull Nandia)<sup>71</sup>). The figure of the god is of brass, while that of the bull is of stone. The *kotwal* keeps his treasure safely hidden in a bag when the marriage season has passed.

The sacrifice to Chhappan *deo* takes place on the evening after the building of the marriage booth. Its ritual is as follows: A goat is sacrificed before the centre post of the marriage booth, the *pujari* cuts off the head of the goat and lays it down before the post. The goat is skinned and the bones removed. Later on, the head may be taken home by the *pujari*, cooked and eaten. Or it is buried with the skin and the bones under the centre post. The meat is prepared and boiled by men of the clan. Women and children are not permitted to attend the function; they have to leave the house and on this night must even sleep elsewhere. Only married or widowed male members of the clan are allowed to take part in the banquet. No clan member who once had been expelled from the caste for some reason is allowed to eat of the sacred meat, nor are unmarried boys. If such a person, be he man or boy, should taste of the sacrificial meat, the Balahis believe that he would meet with some great misfortune, blindness, even death.

As soon as the banquet is over, the remains of the meal are buried in the ground before the centre post of the wedding booth. Nothing may be given to outsiders.

<sup>71</sup>) R. V. RUSSELL writes that Chhappan *deo* is a very curious deity "who is worshipped by a man when his wife has run away. (Chhappan, or fifty-six, is taken to represent the largest number of places to which she may have gone) and he prays that she may not have fled to any of these but to her mother's house. Parents who have lost their children also worship him in the hope of finding them." (Central Provinces District Gazetteer: Nimar District: Vol. A. Allahabad 1908, p. 59.) — However, the Balahis of the Nimar know nothing of this explanation of the god's name and were greatly amused when I told them what RUSSELL had written.

In one group of the Kanerya clan the men are never allowed to eat goat's meat except on the occasion of this sacrifice at a wedding. In the other group the men may eat goat's meat once they have gone through the marriage ceremonies and partaken of the sacrificial meal. The women and girls of the clan are not prohibited from eating goat's meat whenever it is offered them. The two groups of the Kanerya clan, the one which never eats goat's meat except on the day of worship of Chhappan *deo* and the other group which may eat goat's meat after marriage, are considered two different clans which are allowed to intermarry.

The origin of this rite is related as follows; The wife of the ancestor of the clan remained childless for a long time. At last her husband vowed that he would sacrifice a goat to Chhappan *deo* if he had a son, and that he would not taste goat's meat again until the day of his son's marriage. The god granted his prayer and a son was born. Since that time the Kanerya clansmen eat goat's meat only on the wedding day of a member of the clan when a goat is sacrificed to Chhappan *deo*. Subsequently a part of the clan found this prohibition too severe and allowed the eating of goat's meat after marriage.

It is a custom among all castes of the Nimar that, whenever the sacrifice of a goat or cock is promised, no meat of that particular animal may be eaten till the vow is fulfilled. That is perhaps the reason why a boy may not eat goat's meat until the day of his marriage when the sacrifice to Chhappan *deo* is performed for him. Other clansmen are more severe: they never taste goat's meat except at the sacrifice.

(3) *Nilja* is the name of a clan whose ancestor was a Thakur or Mandloi (important landlord) of Niljagarh. The clan's *mata* is Renka *devi*. A goat is sacrificed and an offering made in honour of the clan goddess in the customary form.

(4) Another clan is called *Sauris*. The ancestor of the clan was a Kunbi (agricultural caste) of Jamkotha (possibly Jamghat near Mhow). The clan's goddess is Chawanda *mata* who is worshipped by the clan in the usual manner.

(5) *Puar* is the clan name of a former Bhirala (Bhilala) of Suktai. The *mata* of the clan is called Ijai. No goat is sacrificed to her; and the offering consists simply of a mixture of boiled and raw rice and *ghi*, burned before the usual hand-print on the wall. The *diya* (sacrificial lamp) consists of a ball of raw and boiled rice, the wick in the lamp (a cotton thread) is fed with oil. The lamp must be lighted with a burning cow-dung cake.

(6) The clan *Kherdiya* was founded by a Thakur from Kukdhar. The clan's *mata* is Chawanda. She is worshipped in the month of Kuar with the sacrifice of a goat, before a hand-print on the wall.

The members of this clan have to observe the same restrictions as all worshippers of Chawanda *devi*: they are not allowed to wear clothes of yellow colour, they may not adorn themselves with golden nose-rings, or little brass bells, and they may not build clay hearths (*chulha*).

(7) The ancestor of the clan *Dhaksya* was a Kachi from Nandana. The clan's mother is Renka *mata*. This *mata* is worshipped especially at Sirsood (near Khandwa) where a Balahi is in possession of a brass image of the goddess. At Bhamgarh, about ten miles east of Khandwa, the *mata* is venerated in the form of a stone. At Sirsood and at Bhamgarh the members of the *Dhaksya* clan faithfully worship their *mata* every year, but in other villages the worship of the *mata* is no longer performed regularly.

The *Dhaksya* clan performs the worship of the *mata* in the following manner: Seven *diyas* are prepared of a mixture of wheat flour and water. These *diyas* are placed in a line on the floor of the main room. Behind each *diya* is placed in dough the figure of a god. The seven figures<sup>72)</sup> represent the seven brothers of Renka *mata* whose names are: Bhairu, Bhilat, Rahut, Ganuji (or Gaunjwanya), Dethisamar and Gundal<sup>73)</sup>. These seven Rahuts are also worshipped at Mortakka, a town on the bank of the Nerbudda river where a stone image of the seven brothers is found. Gundal's wife is called Kajar Rani.

The head of the family puts two cotton threads into each of the seven *diyas* which are filled with oil. The threads are dipped into the oil in such a way that the four ends hang out over the brim of the *diya*. Then the head of the family places a wheat bread, fried in oil, beside each figure, and pours boiled rice on each bread. A crumb of sugar or *gur*, a date (*kharik*), almond (*badam*), *singora*, *laung*, *ilaichi*, are added to the dish. Now the figure of Renka *mata* is formed of a dough of wheat flour, and placed behind the dough images of the *mata's* brothers. Pieces of cloth are put on the *mata* and her brothers, starlike ornaments for the forehead (*panal ki tikli*) and *gaur ke bichhe* (toe rings) are presented to her.

The women and girls of the clan are not allowed to buy clothes for themselves of the same colour as the *mata's* garment, nor any such ornaments as it is customary to offer her. But the women may wear these clothes and ornaments if they are presented to them by members of another clan. If a woman of the *Dhaksya* clan wants to wear clothes of this colour or such ornaments, she will beg a few coins from a friend and add to this gift as much money as is needed

<sup>72)</sup> The planets?

<sup>73)</sup> My informant did not remember the name of the seventh.

for the purchase of the desired article. Then she will ask a member of another clan to buy it for her.

(8) The *Pharkalya* clan was founded by a Jadam from Farrabad. The clan's *mata* is Chawanda *deri* who is worshipped with an offering of nine *diyas* prepared from a mixture of wheat and *mahua* flour. A goat is sacrificed and bread made of *mahua* and wheat flour is eaten at the sacrificial meal.

(9) Even a Brahman from Jodhpur became a Balahi: his clan is called *Bandya*. Members of this clan live at Sirsood and Pandhana. They still worship their clan *mata* Chawanda of whom they formerly had a brass image. But the precious image of the goddess was lost in the Apna river near Songir, when a Balahi carrying the image tried to cross the river in the rainy season and was drowned. The *Bandya* clansmen do not sacrifice a goat at the worship of their *mata*.

(10) The *Nirgurya* clan too is of Rajput origin. Their original home village was Katla. Their clan *mata* is Bijasani. The members of this clan are not allowed to buy gold ornaments or gold coins, nor should they touch the *Nirgurya* plant of which they bear the name.

(11) The *Kalam* clan (from Nandana) was founded by a Kunbi. The clan members worship *Kalam mata*. On the day of worship they sacrifice a black or white cock, and offer a coconut, *panchkoka* in a diminutive hut (*mandap*) which is erected under a *Kalam* tree (*Convolvulus repens*). The roof of the *mandap* consists of a wheat cake. No *diya* is burned.

(12) The *Phasya* clan claims descent from a Rajput, and comes from Katgharo near Mandhata (on the Nerbudda). The clan is called after an ancestor who was hanged for some crime. The clan members worship *Renka mata* with the sacrifice of a goat, and an offering of wheat cakes and nine *saras* (*laddu*, a kind of wheat cake, baked in sugar and *ghi*).

(13) The *Inгла* clan (from Haranmar) is descended from a Gujar who killed a doe and ate its meat. For this deed he was put out of caste by his caste-fellows. The clan worships *Renka mata*, with a goat sacrifice and an offering of nine wheat *puris*, to which *mahua* and gram flour is added. Five *diyas* are burned.

(14) The *Phulpagar* clan (from Sthan in Holkar State) was founded by an outcast Mali. The clan members worship Chawanda *mata* on Dasahra *naumi*. Only a coconut is offered. No handprint is made on the wall, nor is anything else offered or sacrificed to the goddess.

(15) The *Kalrya* clan hails from Pipalkotha near Singaji; the clan's founder was a Rajput. The clan worships *Rasain deri* in

the month of Mangsi (January—February). Twenty one *puris* and as many *diyas* are offered, with *panchkoka* and camphor. No hand-print is made on the wall however, nor is a goat sacrificed.

(16) The *Nisawadya* clan (from Maisawa) has a Kachi ancestor. The clansmen worship *Mansali mata*. The ritual of worship is as follows: A bundle of thorns is brought into the house, a black cloth is spread on it. Then husband and wife lay their hands on the cloth and a mixture of rice, sugar, *gur*, and *ghi* is poured on their hands.

The clan members are not allowed to refuse to eat a dish which has been spoiled by bad cooking, by excessive use of salt etc. Therefore the clan is called: *nisavadya* (no taste).

(17) The *Tiparya* clan is from Berar and is descended from a Kunbi. The clan worships *Renka mata* on *Dasahra naumi*. A red sheet is spread on the floor and five small earthen pots (*ghara*) are placed on it, also five clay *diwanis* (lamps). The wicks are fed with sweet oil. The offering consists of twenty-one *puris*, *panchkoka*, and a coconut.

(18) The *Rathor* clan (from Chirmati near Dhertalai in the Tapti valley) is descended from a Rana family. Many members of the clan live at present at Rajgarh, east of Khandwa. The clan *devi* is called Chawanda. She is worshipped on *Dasahra naumi*. At the ceremony the clan members dress in white; they offer seventeen *puris*, seventeen *diyas*, seventeen *panchkokas*, five coconuts, one *kut ka naryal* (coconut of a specific kind). Raw rice grains and *ghi* are poured into the sacrificial fire.

(19) The *bhat's* clan is called *Hanumantya*. His ancestors' home village was Chirakhund near Jaswari (six miles from Khandwa). The clan worships Anjani, the mother of Hanuman. The *mata* is worshipped by the head of the family on *Dasahra naumi* at dawn. The men are dressed in white *dhotis* and shirts during the ceremony. The offering consists of nine piles of nine *puris* each, nine *diyas* filled with *ghi*, nine *gurgurs* (a cake prepared from wheat flour, oil, and burned *gur* or sugar), nine coconuts and nine *panchkokas*.

The sacrificial meal is taken by all clan members, the leavings of the meal are buried under the floor. The offering is performed every year and has so far never been omitted by the *bhat*.

(20) The *Chauhan* clan is also of Rajput origin. The origin of the Balahi branch of the clan is as follows: Many years ago some Chauhan Rajputs went hunting. Towards evening when it began to get dark they spotted a deer and shot it. When they approached their kill, they found to their consternation that they had shot a cow. The unlucky hunters were expelled from the caste and forced to become Balahis. Chauhan clansmen do not eat the meat of the wild boar though other Balahis, and generally even the Rajputs, eat pork.

(21) The *Saunya* clan is another clan of Rajput origin. The legend relates that once when three Rajput brothers went hunting the youngest brother shot a cow which he mistook for a deer. When the hunters discovered what had happened, they forced their unfortunate brother to skin the cow and to eat some of the meat. Then they expelled him from the caste. The man married a Balahi girl and his children became Balahis who skin dead cattle and eat beef.

(22) The *Sakya* clan is another clan that claims a Rajput founder. The origin of this clan is related as follows: The jungle near a Rajput village went up in flames. A calf was caught in the fire and perished though the carcass wasn't wholly burnt in the flames. Rajputs of the nearby village came and found the body well roasted. Thinking that it was a deer that had come to harm in the conflagration, they cut it into pieces and ate the meat. After a while however they found unmistakable signs that instead of the meat of a deer they had eaten that of a cow! The men were expelled from their caste and turned Balahis.

(23) The *Vasalya* clan was founded by a Kunbi who became a Balahi fifty generations ago. Before a boy of this clan takes his wife into his house, the two must first make a pilgrimage to the clan *mata* at Khirgaon. *Vasalya* is the name of the home village of the ancestor of the clan.

(24) The ancestors of the *Varmandal* clan were Ahirs<sup>73</sup>). Members of this clan are not allowed to sit in the shade of the Banyan tree, nor are they permitted to cut it down or to burn its wood. No members of the clan may use Banyan leaves as eating-plates.

The Varmandal clansmen worship Ganesh or the Mata on the occasion of a marriage, on the day of the *haldi* anointment.

The founders of the clan belonged originally to the Ahir caste. The hills near Asirgarh were their home. During the siege of Asirgarh (the exact date of which isn't known) the Ahirs inside the fort suffered from lack of food and in their extremity were forced to eat beef. When afterwards this lapse became known, these Ahirs lost their caste and had to join the Balahi caste.

The clan god of the Varmandal is Assar whose image is venerated on the hill of Asirgarh. The god is worshipped by sacrificing a goat. While the clan still belonged to the Ahir caste, its members were accustomed to sacrifice an unmarried boy to the clan god. Though human sacrifices had long been prohibited by government, the Varmandal continued to perform human sacrifices. But once

<sup>73</sup>) *var* means *ficus religiosa*; *mandal* is the circuit of a tree, or the place which is shaded by the tree when in leaf, i. e. its widest circuit.

when they were carrying a boy hidden in a basket to their place of worship, they met a high official who asked them what was in the basket. They replied: "A goat." But the official was suspicious and ordered them to open the basket. To their surprise the boy had really turned into a goat! Since that time the Varmandal have abandoned human sacrifices and sacrifice a goat in honour of their clan god, a story which is repeatedly related to explain why human sacrifices were abandoned.

There are other Balahi clans of whose origin or ritual of worship nothing is known. For instance: *Ruparel*, *Thilank*, *Khaksya*, *Jhiranya*, *Dhiwdharagya*, *Vasra*, *Sitola*, *Bhagorya* (which means traitor). There is also a Balahi clan, called *Bamanya*. The same clan is also found among the Bhils. The name comes "from Bamnai, a village in Gujarath. They worship the tiger"<sup>74</sup>). Other Balahi clans are: *Bhilang*, *Kasila*, *Nilkhand*, *Kanjriya*.

## Chapter XXI

### Cults of the Mother Goddesses

#### (1) Cult of the *Dhaj mata*

While we get a faint inkling of the original Balahi religion from the quaint ritual of their clan god worship, the Mother cults of the Balahis give us a still clearer idea of its old structure. Though also the Hindus and aboriginal tribes of the district worship the *matas*, the Balahis do it in a special manner and by a ritual which is unknown to other castes.

There are, however, different forms of the Mother cult as practiced by the Balahis. Each group of worshippers has its own ritual and claims primacy over the other groups.

The most solemn and probably oldest form of Mother cult seems to be the cult of the so-called *Dhaj mata*<sup>75</sup>).

The obligation of the Balahis to the annual performance of the worship of the *Dhaj mata* is explained by them in a myth which relates the origin of this cult as follows:

The demon king Ravana had kidnapped Sita, the lovely wife of Rama. He brought her to Lanka and placed her in custody of Surasa, the daughter of the Rakshas Dhaulagir and the mother of the Nagas, with orders to devour anybody trying to rescue his fair captive. Surasa sat down at the only gate of Lanka, ready to pounce upon

<sup>74</sup>) C. F. LUARD: op. cit. p. 162.

<sup>75</sup>) The name *Dhaj* may be a derivative form of *dharti*, the earth, but more probably of the Sanskrit word *dhvaj*, which means a pole or a flag-staff.

any daring rescuer of the faithful wife of Rama. When Hanuman, the monkey god, arrived at Lanka on his search for Sita, he met Surasa at the gate of Lanka. The Rakshas barred his entrance into the town. Hanuman attempted to frighten her by enlarging his bulk to the shape of a giant. But Surasa opened her jaws so wide that they reached heaven and the nether world. At once the cunning monkey god changed himself into a squirrel, leapt into the gaping mouth of the female demon and quickly slipped out by her ear. Assuming again the shape of a giant he turned round and slew Surasa. He cut the body into pieces and scattered her bones all over the world. A part of her spine fell down at the foot of Mahadeo, in the Satpura mountains, while another part touched ground at Lanka where the formidable Surasa revived.

Surasa recovered all the scattered parts of her body except that part of her back-bone which had fallen at the foot of Mahadeo. When Surasa asked Mahadeo to return the bone to her, he replied that he knew nothing about it. After that Surasa called four Balahis, dressed them in red dancing garments and gave them two drums and a brass-plate. Thus attired Surasa sent the Balahis out to search everywhere for the missing part of her spine. The Balahis went on their way, two of them dancing and drumming, one beating his fingers on the brass-plate to the rhythm of the drums, the fourth carrying the part of the Rakshas' spine that had been found at Lanka. The search party went on pilgrimage to the hill of Mahadeo in the Satpuras, convinced that the other half of Surasa's back-bone was hidden there. On the way the dancers sang: "*Dhundala! Dhundala!* (Search, search!)", while the man who beat the rhythm on the brass plate with the fingers of his right hand sang: "*Paragayo, khogayo! Ab nahi milega!* (It is lost, and will never be found again!)" But the Balahis were quite unsuccessful, they never found the missing part of the spine. This is the reason why they have to go out every year on pilgrimage to the Mahadeo hill in the Satpuras till the spine is found.

The part of Surasa's back-bone that is in the hands of the Balahi dancers on their pilgrimage, is represented by a bamboo pole some 16 feet long. It is called the Dhaj-Mata. An iron bar about a foot in length is attached to the bottom of the pole. It has the form of a spear-head, or, more exactly, of a primitive plough share. It is most probably the image of the latter, for it is called *kusla* which is the local term for the spear-headed plough-share, peculiar to the country. This sacred pole is kept in the house not of a Balahi, but of a *mandloi* (chief) of the Bharuri Ahir caste, at Khandwa. Nobody knows how and when the Dhaj-mata came into his possession. The

Balahis believe that this sacred bamboo pole is very old and imperishable. (It is in fact almost black with age.)

Some years ago, they relate, a fire broke out in the house of the *mandloi* where the Dhaj-Mata pole is kept. A rescue was impossible. Suddenly the Dhaj-Mata was seen lifted up by invisible hands and placed high on a tree out of danger.

Nobody is allowed to touch the sacred bamboo except the Bhagats (the dancing worshippers of the Mata) on pilgrimage. The sacred pole itself should not touch the bare ground, but is kept high up close to the roof on the rafter. There it rests throughout the year except for the 30 days of the pilgrimage which ends at a shrine of Mahadeo. The Bhagats (devotees) are members of special families, whose privilege it is to officiate as priests at the Dhaj-mata worship. They are all Balahis and their office is hereditary. No member of another caste may take any active part in the worship.

About three weeks before Shivaratri, the great feast of Mahadeo in the Hindu month of Phagun (February), the Bhagats of a few villages around Khandwa, as Bara-Awar, Nagechun, Borgaon, and Bhaukhera, assemble at the house of the Bharuri Ahir at Khandwa. They inform him that the time for the pilgrimage is near and select from their number those that will take part. The Gauli (Ahir) promises to pay each Bhagat ten to twelve rupees and to leave them all the offerings in kind, but he claims all the offerings which are made to the Bhagats in cash.

The thirty days' programme is busy. In fifteen days the Bhagats have to visit on their pilgrimage 365 villages. After that, in another fortnight, they carry the sacred bamboo pole up to the shrine of Mahadeo at Pachmarhi in the Satpura mountains. However, the pilgrimage to Pachmarhi is not performed every year. Sometimes a shrine of Mahadeo near Burhanpur or on the Nerbudda River is visited. During all the days of pilgrimage the devotees must dance and sing continually without any break, day or night. They are not allowed to stop for a moment on their pilgrimage through the villages till they have reached the shrine of Mahadeo. They take turns in their dancing, one part of the group sings and dances on, while the other Bhagats meanwhile take a short rest. After the pilgrimage the devotees of the Dhaj-mata are usually so exhausted, that some of them fall sick and even die from over-strain. But the Balahi Bhagats consider this pilgrimage their most sacred privilege and duty which they must fulfil even at the cost of heavy sacrifices.

The Dhaj-mata is held in the highest esteem, even by Hindus, so much so that during the pilgrimage, they sometimes exempt the Bhagats from the rules of untouchability and allow them to enter their houses. They even give them their own plates and vessels at meal time.

Before starting on their journey, on Magh Chaudas, an initial sacrifice is made at the house of the *mandloi*. The *pujari* (officiating priest) must be a young Balahi without stain, fault or scar on his body. They prefer to choose an unmarried youth (*kumwara*) for the performance of this ceremony. It is generally very difficult to find a Balahi who is without a scar on his body because of the common habit of burning the body with the milk of *thuar*, as a cure against fever or other diseases. But no member of the families, charged with the worship of the Dhaj-mata, will ever apply this remedy for fear of getting scarred. If possible, a youth of these privileged families is selected for the honour of officiating at the sacrifice, but if no suitable young man is available within the circle of the chief worshippers, another Balahi boy whose body is faultless can be chosen. He receives a handsome reward for the performance of the offering.

On the day previous to the sacrifice the house of the Ahir receives a thorough cleaning and a coating of fresh cow-dung. When the sacrifice is to take place, the worshippers assemble before the house of the *mandloi* at Khandwa. The Daj-mata is placed in an upright position, the iron bar at the bottom, on a brick pedestal in the centre of the main room of the house, leaning against a pillar. On the right side is an elevated seat (*gaddi*) from where the owner of the Dhaj-mata attends the ceremony. When the *pujari* enters, doors and windows are carefully shut behind him, so that nobody can enter or peep through any chinks into the room. This secrecy, as well as the stress laid on the corporal integrity of the officiating *pujari*, seems to suggest that in former times a human sacrifice was made on this occasion. The Balahis indeed admit that in ancient days a boy was sacrificed to the Dhaj-mata; the victim of those days now seems to have taken the position of the officiating priest. Probably the role of the *mandloi* was less passive in those days!

The young Balahi undresses and takes a purifying bath. Then he removes the covering sheet from the sacred bamboo pole and washes it from top to bottom, after which he wraps it in a white cloth, sixty-five *hath* (cubits) long and about one *hath* broad. This cloth must be woven by a Balahi, with as little use as possible of spinning and weaving tools. That means that the yarn must be spun by hand, and woven without a shuttle. After replacing the Dhaj-mata on the pedestal, the young Balahi performs the sacrifice which marks the beginning of the pilgrimage. He pours *ghi* and milk into a fire that burns in a small earthen vessel before the sacred bamboo pole. Then he paints the iron bar with *kuku*, *sendhur*, and attaches a *tika* (star-like ornament of gold-paper) to it. He worships the Dhaj-mata by touching with folded hands the ground

in front of it and then raising his hands to his forehead. After that he approaches the seat of the *mandloi*, applies *kuku*, *sendhur*, and *tika* first to the throne of the Gauli, then to the man's forehead. Then the Gauli himself rises and approaches the Dhaj-mata before which he makes his obeisance, bowing low and touching the floor with folded hands.

After the sacrifice, the Balahi *pujari* lifts the sacred bamboo pole from the pedestal and carries it into the open. In front of the house a huge crowd of worshippers has gathered who greet the Dhaj-mata with shouts of "*Mahadeo ki jai!*" (Hail, Mahadeo!). A Balahi musician blows the *sing* while others beat their drums. As soon as the Dhaj-mata appears, her devotees begin to dance in front of the Mata. The sacred bamboo is held in an upright position and must be carried aloft as long as the pilgrimage lasts, without ever touching the ground.

The dress of the Balahi Bhagats is peculiar: a red-coloured coat, reaching down to the ankles; two white scarfs, crossed at the back and in front, covered with tinsel and chips of mirror; a white and red turban, one end of which passes under the chin; and, to cap all, a bunch of artificial flowers tucked into the folds of the turban. The drums of the Bhagats are carved out of one single piece of wood, in the shape of a sand-glass, with a narrow waist, and spanned at both sides with lizard-skins. The Balahis claim that this dancing dress is their own invention and is not borrowed from the Gonds and Korkus of the Nimar who are decked out in similar attire when dancing. This may be true, for the Balahis make their own dancing outfit, while the aboriginals of the district order their coats from a Hindu tailor.

Everywhere the Bhagats are well received. On entering a village they proceed at once to the house of the *patel*. There everything is prepared for the reception of the Dhaj-mata. The *patel*, and after him all the other villagers, worship the Mata in the usual manner. Small offerings are made to the sacred pole. Those of the devotees who are 'off duty' sit down to a meal, while the celebration goes on. For all the time the dance must continue without interruption. The offerings in kind are deposited with a trustworthy person, and will be collected on the return journey. Sometimes they are sold in the next village. The Bhagats do not visit the Balahi quarters but keep aloof from their caste fellows. If the village head-man is a Muslim, a wealthy Hindu instead will play host to the Dhaj-mata to obtain her blessing for house and field.

Thus the Bhagats go on from village to village, dancing and drumming. At first they are accompanied by a crowd of worshippers and musicians, and pass through many prosperous villages. But

gradually the crowd falls off, the procession enters the jungly region of the poor Korkus and Gonds. Alone, taxed to the extremity of their strength and endurance, the dancing Bhagats push on, over hills and rocks, across rivers and ravines, on to the sacred shrine of Mahadeo at Pachmarhi.

Mahadeo is the name of a peak in the Satpura mountains, 4384 ft. high. A cave and shrine of the god Mahadeo is found there. A stream of clear cold water issues from a cleft close by. The arrival of the Bhagats coincides with the annual Shivaratri festival which attracts many pilgrims.

The Dhaj-mata is immersed (*thanda karna*, to cool) in the water of the cave. Then the Bhagats lift the top of their sacred pole out of the water, strip off the old cloth, and immediately wrap the uncovered part into a new white cloth. This is done with the most scrupulous care, so that no part may remain uncovered longer than necessary. After the "cooling" the clients of the Dhaj-mata make an offering to Mahadeo and immediately start for home. This time they take the Dhaj-mata on their shoulders in a horizontal position, like a corpse (*lash*). The Mata is supposed to be dead after the immersion. The "other part of the back-bone", they were looking for, has not been found, so the pilgrimage has to be repeated the following year. On their journey, they may either all take the same route, or else some men are despatched to collect the deposited offerings while the main party returns by train.

The Dhaj-mata is returned without any ceremonies to the Bharuri Ahir who deposits her on the rafters under the roof. There she rests once more for another year.

There is another Dhaj-mata at Ghatakheri, about six miles south of Pandhana. She is kept in the house of the landlord of this place, a Thakur. He gets all the cash offerings earned by the Bhagats on their pilgrimage, but pays about Rs. 10 to each of the Bhagats and leaves them all the offerings in kind.

This *mata* is not held in such a high esteem by the Hindus who consider her to be only an image (*nishan*) of the true Dhaj-mata at Khandwa. The Bhagats of this *mata* visit only about 30 villages in the neighbourhood of Ghatakheri. Their bamboo pole is only half the length of the sacred pole at Khandwa. The Bhagats are not obliged to sing and dance day and night uninterruptedly but may take their rest at leisure. The initial sacrifice and the offerings in the villages are performed in the same manner as those of the Dhaj-mata at Khandwa.

These Bhagats are not exempted from their untouchability, they must go to the Balahi quarters for food and rest, as the high-caste Hindus refuse to entertain them in their own houses. They are

called the *chhote bhagat* which means: the small Bhagats, whereas the Bhagats of the Khandwa Mata are called *mukhye bhagat* — the main Bhagats. These Bhagats too belong exclusively to the Balahi caste, although the owner of the *mata* is a Thakur by caste. The Bhagats of Ghatakheri are on pilgrimage for about a month, then they return to their village and hand over the *mata* to the Thakur who deposits her under the roof of his house till the pilgrimage in the following year.

## (2) The Cult of Gopi Maharaj

The worship of the Dhaj-mata is limited to the Nimar and Hoshangabad districts of the Central Provinces. But there exists a similar cult among the Balahis of the Holkar State. Its centre is at Mahomedpur, about 40 miles west of Khandwa. The origin of this cult is related as follows:

Many years ago a poor Balahi weaver sat in despair at his weaving loom. He had not a morsel in his house to feed his hungry children. Facing starvation, he began to cry bitterly. After a while, when he looked up, he saw a strange incident. The wooden peg to which the warp of his loom was fastened to keep the threads straight for the crossing by the woof, began slowly to grow and turned into a beautiful tree. In his excitement and wonder, the Balahi forgot all his troubles, he rushed out of his house and called the whole village together. His caste-fellows came, saw the wonder-tree and came to the conclusion, that this was evidently the work of Gopi Maharaj (Mahadeo). It is said that the miraculous tree can still be seen at Mahomedpur in the house of a Balahi. But it is now only a dry stump without branches, about 4 ft. high and a foot in diameter.

The Balahis of Mahomedpur worship Gopi Maharaj with rites similar to those of the Dhaj-mata. As they cannot take the tree along on their pilgrimage, they take a bamboo pole instead. Every year, a month before Shivaratri, the owner of the miraculous tree sends some of his caste fellows into the forest to cut a long, straight, faultless bamboo pole. It costs him nearly Rs. 20 every year, as such a bamboo is not easily found.

The initial sacrifice in the house of the Balahi is similar to that of the Dhaj-mata at Khandwa. The Bhagats, however, do not go to Pachmarhi, but to another shrine of Mahadeo on the Nerbudda river. They sink the bamboo pole in the river and return without it. It is only a sign and symbol of the wonder tree in the Balahi's house, representing Gopi Maharaj (another name of Mahadeo). As the sacred bamboo pole is not brought back to Mahomedpur, a new one has to be cut every year. The Bhagats' pilgrimage lasts about a month and is performed in the same manner as at Ghatakheri.

(2) The Cult of the *Kati mata*

In a similar manner and by a similar ritual the Balahis worship *Kati mata* (the Cotton-Mother). While the cult of the *Dhaj mata* is somewhat aristocratic and severe in its ritual, the worship of the *Kati mata* is more congenial to the easy-going character of the Balahis. *Kati mata*, the Cotton-Mother<sup>76</sup>), is worshipped mainly by the Katia Balahis, another sub-caste of the Balahis, who live east and north of the habitat of the Nimar Balahis. While in the Nimar its cultivation seems a relatively recent introduction, cotton has been grown more intensively in the country where the Katia and Gan-noria Balahis are at home. The worship of the *Kati mata* must have been brought into the Nimar by Katia Balahis who have either settled down there or are in the habit of coming there yearly in great numbers at the beginning of the monsoon for work.

The mythical origin of the *Kati-mata* cult is related as follows:

*Kati-mata* was the sister of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. Once on a Holi feast, after a quarrel with her brother, *Kati* went in her anger and distress to the place, where the Holi fire was burning, and threw herself into the flames. When Ravana heard of this desperate action of his sister he rushed to the spot to rescue her. But alas, he came too late. The fire had already consumed the body of his sister to the bones, which Ravana pulled out of the fire. But when Ravana touched them the bones instantly turned into a bamboo stick and a branch of the Palas tree (*Butea frondosa*). Ravana got angry and threw them away. He went home cursing, unable to restore his sister to life out of mere bamboo sticks. But a Balahi had watched the whole scene from afar. Now he cautiously approached and got hold of the two sticks. He suspected great magical

<sup>76</sup>) That *Kati mata* is indeed the Cotton-Mother, is proved by a custom current in the Punjab, related by J. G. FRAZER: *The Golden Bough: Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*, vol. 1, p. 178 (London 1912). He writes: "In the Punjab to the east of the Jumna, when the cotton boles begin to burst, it is usual to select the largest plant in the field, sprinkle it with butter-milk and rice-water and then bind to it pieces of cotton taken from the other plants of the field. This selected plant is called *Sirdar* or *Bhogaldai*, that is "Mother-cotton", from *bhogla*, a name sometimes given to a large cotton-pod, and *dai* (for *daiya*) 'a mother' and after it has been saluted, prayers are offered that the other plants may resemble it in the richness of their produce. (H. M. ELLIOT: *Supplemental glossary of Terms used in North-western Provinces*, edited by J. BEAMES (London 1869, 1/254)."

The same custom is still in vogue in the Nimar, but the cotton plant, which in the Punjab is called *Bhogaldai*, is here called *Kati mata*. It is obviously the same *mata* whose worship is performed by the Nimar Balahis in the above described manner.

power hidden in these two mysterious sticks. And he was right. The next night Kati-mata appeared to him in a dream and told him: "Why did you pick up my bones? Now, that you have done so, you shall worship me by a yearly sacrifice", which she then taught him to perform.

The Balahi woke up, and at once he got to work to fulfil the order of the *devi*. He took the two sticks, tied them crosswise and covered them with two pieces of red cloth. On the upper end of the upright stick (of *palas* wood) he tied the feathers of a peacock, representing the hair of the *mata*. On the joint of the two sticks he hung a necklace of coconuts (reminding one of the necklace of human skulls of the dreadful Kali). On either end of the cross-stick (of bamboo), which represents the arms of the *mata*, he put some bangles and arm-rings. The foot of the upright stick rests in a square piece of wood, the 'shoe' of the goddess.

After that the Balahi made a dancing dress, according to the design of the Mata. It looks very picturesque and does honour to the artistic talents of the goddess. A red-coloured coat reaching from the shoulders to the ankles, with many pleats down from the waist. Over the coat two scarfs, of white colour, covered all over with tinsel, pieces of mirror and sewn with gaily coloured thread. The dancers wear them crossed on the chest and back. They are held by a white or red belt. The turban consists of two long strips of white and red cloth. One end of the turban-cloth hangs down over the shoulders, the other end is wrapped round the chin and tucked into the folds of the turban, to keep it tight during the dance. A bundle of artificial flowers in the folds of the turban, cheap embroidery and tassels hanging down from the belt, complete the dancers' dress. Every dancer carries a drum, carved from a solid block of wood and covered on either end with a lizard skin. The drum is about a foot long, with a narrow waist, broadening out towards both ends. It looks, as if the two halves of a coconut-shell had been joined, with the open parts to the outside. The drum (*dhholki*) is beaten with a thin stick. This is the outfit of the dancers, as designed by the goddess.

Four men are required for the worship of the Kati *mata*: two Bhagats in the dancing dress, a third, usually an elderly man, who carries the image of the Kati-mata, and a fourth one who beats the rhythm of the drums with the fingers of his right hand on a small brass plate thus accompanying the sound of the drums with its tingling.

The beginning of the Kati-mata cult does not coincide with the worship of the Dhaj-mata. It starts earlier, already on Kartik Gyaras (the 11th day of the 8th Hindu month) and lasts for more than

three months. The worship of the Kati-mata coincides with the cotton-picking season.

The owner of a Kati *mata* image is nearly always a Balahi. The *pujari* is always a Balahi, and in most cases also the hereditary owner of the image. While only two images of the Dhaj *mata* are found in the Nimar, the one at Khandwa in the house of the Ahir and the other at Ghatakheri (which latter is merely a replica of the Dhaj *mata* at Khandwa), there exist quite a number of Kati *mata* images. Each group of fifteen to twenty villages have a Kati *mata* of their own. In some villages the image is kept in the house of a Teli or Chamar. But also in these rare cases the Bhagats must always be Balahis. Only, since the owner of the image is a Teli or Chamar, the Bhagats visit on the pilgrimage first of all the houses of the Telis or Chamars.

The worship of the Kati-mata begins with the sacrifice of a black goat. The animal is brought before the Kati-mata who is tied to the middle pillar of the house to keep her in an upright position. The *pujari* cuts the throat of the victim, its warm blood is sprinkled over the *mata* image, then on the dancing dress of the Bhagats and on all who attend the sacrifice.

The Balahis admit that formerly instead of a goat a boy was sacrificed on that occasion. But once it happened that a Raja arrived at the village just at the moment of the sacrifice. The frightened Balahis, fearing severe punishment, turned a basket over the slaughtered boy. The Raja, however, became suspicious and, seeing the basket, asked the Balahis: "What is under the basket?" The Balahis, never for a moment at a loss for an excuse, replied "The body of a goat, Maharaj, which we have sacrificed to the Kati-mata!" The Raja ordered them to remove the basket from the body and lo! the boy's body had turned into a goat. Since that time the Bhagats offer a goat as a substitute for human sacrifice.

The Balahis maintain that this custom of human sacrifice has not been abandoned altogether, but is still performed now and then, although seldom and in greatest secrecy. They told me of an orphan boy who only a few years ago had disappeared without leaving a trace and was never seen again. The case was reported to the police and the boy's relatives had searched the whole Nimar district and the near Holkar State, but without success. The Balahis were convinced, that the boy had been kidnapped for human sacrifice.

The goat is sacrificed in honour of Mahadeo, though the performance is held before the Kati-mata. The worshippers shout: "*Mahadeo ki jai!*" (Praise to Mahadeo) and assert that the sacrifice is offered for the glory of Mahadeo and in order to gain his blessing for family and field. After the goat is killed, its head is cut off and laid down

before the Mata. Then the goat is skinned and all the bones are buried in the ground before the image. The meat is taken and boiled for the sacrificial meal. It is served with wheat bread. All the Bhagats, but also the other Balahis of the village, partake of the meal, after having worshipped the Mata with offerings of coconuts, *kuku*, *sendhur*, and the other usual ingredients required for an offering.

After the meal all the Balahis get up. With shouts of '*Mahadeo ki jai*' one of the Balahis takes up the image of the Kati-mata, while two other Balahis, dressed in the glaringly red Bhagat garments begin to sing, drum and dance, and a fourth beats the rhythm with his fingers on a brass plate. The two Bhagats always dance together in a circle before the idol. All their limbs are in constant motion, in rhythm to the beating of the drums and the tingling on the brass plate. It is a wild dance, with shouts of *Mahadeo ki jai* at intervals, with incessant singing and drumming. Sometimes they stamp on the ground with their feet, then they whirl around in passionate rhythm, calming down for a moment but only to get breath for new jumps and leaps. Their wide, gaily coloured, plaited garments and white scarfs and belts flutter in the wind and serve to accentuate strongly their primitive dance.

The dancing party proceeds first to the *malguzar* (land-lord) of the village. He, or in his absence the *patel* (headman of the village), worships the Kati-mata and offers coconuts, lemons, *haldi* (turmeric) and sometimes grain. He applies *kuku* and *sendhur* to the Kati-mata and adores her, touching the ground before her and then his own forehead with joined hands. Then he gives a rupee or at least half a rupee to the Bhagats. During the performance a small oil lamp (*diya*) burns before the Mata. After the *patel*, the other villagers also come and worship, offering their gifts of kind and coin to the Kati-mata. The offered coconuts are hung round the neck of the *mata*, gifts of cloth are made to cover her body, sometimes even silver-bangles are presented to adorn her. The goddess is held in high esteem among the Hindus of the Nimar who expect abundant blessings from her for their house and field.

After the offering the *patel* usually gives a banquet to the Bhagats. The dancers stop and sit down to their meal. But since they are not allowed to use the plates of the high-caste Hindus, the meal is served on big green leaves. After the meal the Bhagats sing and dance till dawn. Then they go to the Balahi quarters for a well-earned rest. Late in the morning they get up, dress again and wander through the village, singing, dancing, and begging. They remain a few days in each village until the scarcity of offerings makes a change of place advisable. Then they leave the village, but

not before they have made an offering to the so-called *panch paurhi* (five youths), a heap of five stones under a shady tree, representing probably the five Pandava brothers<sup>77</sup>). This offering is made only on leaving the first village they visit on their begging tour.

The Bhagats are on pilgrimage for about three months, till Shivaratri. The radius of their activity is, however, limited to about ten to fifteen surrounding villages. If they overstep their 'jurisdiction' and beg in villages which belong to another group of Bhagats, it often leads to a fight between the rivals. It happens, then, that the Bhagats of two different Kati *mata* images lose their temper to such an extent that they beat each other with the very sticks which they present for worship.

A still fiercer hostility exists between the worshippers of the Dhaj *mata* and those of the Kati *mata*. The Bhagats of the Kati *mata* usually leave the village at once and disappear when the long white pole of the Dhaj *mata* is carried into the village. But if they are surprised, the Bhagats of the Dhaj *mata* force them to dance and to sing before the Dhaj *mata* until they fall down from exhaustion. It is believed that in addition the followers of the Kati *mata* receive also all kinds of sickness, fever, dysentery, and vomiting, as a punishment if they venture to meet the Dhaj *mata* procession. The devotees of the Dhaj *mata* naturally resent the competition of the worshippers of the Kati *mata*, whereas the Bhagats of the Kati *mata* assert that the Dhaj *mata* is no Balahi goddess, because the sacred bamboo pole is kept in the house of an Ahir.

But in spite of this fierce rivalry, there is ample reason to believe that these cults have all the same basic origin. For though the Bhagats of the three forms of *mata* worship disclaim any connection and relation with each other, the ritual of the cults shows that they have many elements in common. The object of worship in all three cults is a bamboo stick, attached either to an iron bar, or to a piece of wood of the Palas tree. The Bhagats' dancing costume and their dances are exactly the same in all three cults. Although the cult of the Kati *mata* begins earlier, it comes to a close at the same time as the other cults. In all three forms of *mata* worship it is fertility of the fields and a good harvest which is implored. Also the mythological origin of the Dhaj *mata* cult is not very different from that of the Kati *mata* cult; and in both myths the Balahis are given the order to collect the bones of the Mata for a future restoration to life.

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<sup>77</sup>) It must be noted here that at Pachmarhi too, there are five caves near the shrine of Mahadeo, where the Pandava brothers are said to have found shelter during their exile from their kingdom.

It is difficult to explain the exact meaning and purpose of these cults, and the significance of the individual ceremonies. I do not venture to give an explanation of my own, but suggest that these cults should be compared with similar forms of *mata* worship current in other parts of India. For though in the Nimar District only the Balahis are occupied in these cults, similar forms are not unknown in Bengal and in the North of India. Already the aboriginal Gonds whose westernmost sub-groups reach the eastern parts of the Nimar District, worship Marhai *mata* by similar rites. Once a year the *mata*, represented by a long bamboo pole, is carried in erect position to a river<sup>78</sup>). Also the Baiga of the Mandla and Balaghat Districts practice a *mata* cult by carrying bamboo poles, representing the goddess, around the villages and begging from the people<sup>79</sup>).

A similar cult of a *mata*, called "The Old Lady" (*Byri*, or *Mata*, *Mai*, *Thakurani* etc.) is found in parts of Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Chota Nagpur<sup>80</sup>).

## Chapter XXII

### Magic and Superstition

The Balahis live from earliest childhood in an atmosphere saturated with superstitious beliefs. Ignorant of the true driving factors in the realm of nature, they are inclined to see everywhere the manifestation of super-human mysterious powers. This tendency is strongly nourished by wandering *sadhus*, beggars, and professional entertainers who make it a source of income to fill the impressionable minds of the simple villagers with Hindu, and strange tribal, mythology. Early the Balahis learn to accept all social and religious customs and usages of their caste as indisputable divine laws. If a Balahi is inquisitive and inquires after the cause and meaning of natural phenomena, he is dumb-founded with a mythological explanation which he is supposed to swallow implicitly in the name of religion. To question the truth of such explanations would be considered as a deplorable lack of religious spirit.

No wonder, therefore, that the Balahis, in such a state of mind, suspect the machinations of super-human forces behind every striking event in their lives. By way of most intricate and curious magical

<sup>78</sup>) Cf. W. KOPPERS: Zentralindische Fruchtbarkeitsriten und ihre Beziehungen zur Induskultur, "Geographica Helvetica", 1, 1946, Heft 2, p. 170.

<sup>79</sup>) V. ELWIN: The Baiga, London 1939, p. 59—60.

<sup>80</sup>) NANIMADHAB CHAUDURI: Cult of the Old Lady, J. of R. A. S. B. vol. V. 1939, No. 3, pp. 417—425.

devices they try to secure the help and favour of well-meaning spirits, and protection against the tricks and wiles of malignant goblins. Their whole life is a struggle with these illusive super-human beings. They are uncapturable, wily, but very real and formidable forces. It is wise, in the opinion of the Balahis, to take them into account in all undertakings in this life.

### (1) Omens and Forebodings

The Balahis believe in many omens which strongly influence their every-day lives. Especially the occurrences and sights of early morning are believed to foreshadow the events of the day.

When a Balahi sees a Brahman in the morning before anything else he believes that he will get nothing to eat for the whole day. On such a day he will undertake nothing important, in the conviction that it would be a failure. The Balahis call the Brahmans *hatyar* — blood-sucker.

It is a bad omen (*kharab sagun*) to see a widow in the morning, but the sight of a married woman is auspicious.

Meeting a woman or girl with a full water-pot on her head makes a day successful; a woman or girl going to the well with an empty pot, is so bad an omen that many a Balahi will turn round and go home in the belief that on this day nothing will turn out well.

It is a bad omen to meet a funeral party. That is the reason why such a party always leaves the village by the shortest route and avoids passing houses and people on the way to the graveyard. Women and children should hide when a corpse is carried in the street.

It is inauspicious to meet a *nai* early in the morning.

If a deer crosses one's way from the left to the right side, it is a good sign; but if it crosses from the right to the left, it is unlucky.

A Balahi who meets a Teli (maker of oil) with a pot of oil believes that his work of the day will be accomplished but slowly and with difficulty, similar to the Teli's work who presses the oil by turning the heavy mill-stone slowly and with difficulty.

It is a bad omen to meet early in the morning a *Basor* (Chermal), maker of baskets.

It is very unfortunate to look at an outcast *hatyar* (cow-killer). To meet a barren woman, is also a bad omen.

If a cat or mongoose crosses one's way, it is a bad omen; but if one meets a dog or jackal, the day will be prosperous.

When a man's *pagri* (turban) gets loose and falls off from his head, the Balahi says: *Is ki izzat gayi, girgayi!* (He has lost his honour).

It is a bad omen if a *holgi* (pidgeon) sits down on a house roof, especially if one of the family is sick. When a Balahi catches a *holgi*, he twists off its neck and throws the head away. For the head of a *holgi* is regarded as impure, not its body. There is no such prejudice against the head of a chicken — it is eaten with the body.

It is a very bad omen if a wild pidgeon enters the house of a Balahi. The whole house must be cleaned and smeared with cow-dung.

Sneezing brings bad luck: If a Balahi sneezes in the early morning, he will not undertake anything of importance on that day. If he sneezes at the time when he is about to begin some important work, he will postpone it for another day.

Of the days of the week the Saturday is specially inauspicious. No important business should be started on such a day. Thursdays and Fridays, however, are auspicious and will bring luck.

There are even certain numbers which are considered unlucky. The Balahis do not like to get their children married or to begin their married life in a year that ends in an even number.

Things that by their form and shape, or by any other mental association are linked with unhappy events or articles used in misfortune are always considered bad omens.

Thus Balahis do not sleep with their feet pointing northwards, because the body of a deceased is placed in this position in the grave.

A young Balahi woman about to be married refused to accept the bright red veil that her bridegroom had bought for her; She said that she would never dress in a garment of this colour since dead women were buried in a red veil.

Often, when several members of a family die within a short time, the house where the family lived is abandoned. Sometimes, after an epidemic, a whole village may be deserted by the superstitious villagers. They may return to their old home after a year, if at all, but not without previously performing an offering to some deity.

Hiccuping is attributed to recollection by one's friends or relatives. To get rid of it, one has to repeat the names of all friends and relatives one remembers. As soon as the right name is called out, the hiccuping will stop.

The Balahis believe that even the sex of a yet unborn child can be detected by certain devices. A sure way to ascertain the sex of a child still in the mother's womb is the following: Two persons take a stem of the *dongri* grass (a dark-green kind with a thick stem) at either end. With their finger-nails they make an incision at both ends and then, gripping the ends, they rip the stem asunder

while they say: *Bhika* (the child's father) *ki stri larka howe, to palna; larki howe, to muska!* (If *Bhika's* wife will get a boy, a cradle, — if a girl, a muzzle!)

The explanation of this device is that the Balahis believe that, if the fissures made at either end of the stem do not meet, the stem resembles a cradle, and consequently a boy will be born. If the blade of grass is cut at both ends in such a way that the stem parts into two halves when the middle is reached, it looks like the muzzle of a bullock, and consequently the birth of a girl is expected. The performance is repeated three times. If three times the same result is achieved, the sex of the coming child is surely that which the experiment indicates. If the results are contradictory, the experiment is negative and must be repeated at some other time.

If one asks the Balahis why a stem of grass should resemble a cradle if the fissures do not meet in the middle, or why it looks like a muzzle if the fissures do meet; and why a cradle should indicate a boy, or a muzzle a girl, they simply shrug their shoulder and say that they do not know. They are not at all interested in finding a logical explanation for such experiments.

## (2) Charms

If a person is down with fever and medicines are of no avail, a relative of the sick person goes to the village shop and buys a coconut, *kuku*, *sendhur*, incense sticks, and some other articles, required for an offering. Then he proceeds to a place outside the village where *gokhru* bushes grow in abundance. He stops before a bush and applies *kuku* to its stem, at a spot near the root. Then he breaks the coconut, and offers the other articles, as *sendhur*, *kapur*, incense sticks, and venerates the spirit of the bush. After the offering he digs out a root of the bush, and cuts off a piece of it which he takes home.

In the house the women kindle a fire. The man pours sweet oil into the flames. Then he ties a string twisted out of a white and a red thread round the root. Holding the ends of the thread, he gently swings the root over the fire till it is well roasted. Then he ties it around the right ankle of the patient. The Balahis believe that in most cases this charm is sufficient to cure a patient. However, if the charm should have its effect, the patient must abstain from eating *urad ki dal* (pulse of *urad*) or any dish prepared with oil.

Another charm is prepared in the following manner: A thread (*mala*) is taken from the weaving loom. It is soaked in warm oil and then tied round the right ankle of the patient. The Balahis who by caste are weavers believe in the curative power of their loom.

When the fever ceases, but leaves the convalescent still weak and ailing, his relatives may cut a lock of hair from an old woman, plait it into a tress about six inches long, tie a *kauri* shell to it and wind it around the right ankle of the patient. This charm is very common among the Balahis of the Nimar.

To cure stomach-ache a thread is tied around the big toes of the patient. Sometimes the thread is replaced by a silver-ring, or an iron-ring, to provide a permanent preventive charm against stomach-ache.

To frighten away evil spirits, iron is considered of great benefit. Often a sickle is pushed in between the strings of a sick-bed, with the edge downwards. Evil spirits are supposed to fear the cutting edge of the sickle.

Sometimes the relatives of a patient hide a horse-shoe under his blanket, or hang it on a string just above his head.

Iron pieces of all shapes, as knives, sickles, nails, horse-shoes, have curative power and chase away malignant spirits. A woman after child-birth must always keep a sickle near her. If she leaves the house, she must carry it on her shoulder.

The vertebrae of a snake, filed on a string and worn around the neck, are another preventive and curative charm against all kinds of diseases.

The belief in the 'evil eye' is very strong among the Balahis. Women, and even men, with unusually bright eyes and a piercing look are believed to have the 'evil eye' which causes children to get sick, and waste away. But also other persons may cast an 'evil eye' upon a person, if they look at an object with the feeling of desire, envy or hatred. Balahis do not like it if one admires their children's beauty or strength, for they suspect that such expressions of admiration are prompted by envy or jealousy. Especially a barren woman is not allowed to look at a baby, because her gaze will be full of desire and envy.

The most popular charm against the 'evil eye' is lamp-black (*kajal*), which is smeared around the eyes of a child. This lamp-black is prepared in the following way: A small earthen pot (*diya*, or *diwani*) is filled with *tilli* oil. A cotton wick is soaked in the oil and lighted. Then a brass plate (*prat*) cleaned with ashes is held over the flame. The soot of the oil lamp blackens the bottom of the plate. A finger is dipped into the soot and the lamp-black smeared around the eyes of the child exposed to the spell of the 'evil eye'.

Or a Sadhu or 'healer' is requested to speak *mantras* (magic spells) over the child.

Or again, the mother takes dust from the foot steps of the person who is suspected of having cast the 'evil eye'. The dust is roasted over a fire and then thrown away.

A barren woman is often advised by a magician (*barwa*) to put fire to five or seven houses, or hay-stacks. The excitement over the fire is believed to make a barren woman capable of conception.

A safer method is to offer coconuts under a sacred *pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*), or to hang a miniature *palang* (bedstead) in its branches, or to place it under the tree.

Other sterile women try to get hold of a cloth which has been soiled by the menstrual blood of a woman who has already born children. They cut a tip of it, burn it and swallow the ashes. They believe that the fecundity of the other woman will pass over to them.

There are some women who secretly obtain possession of the umbilical cord of a new-born baby and eat a piece of it. The child, people think, must die but its spirit will be reborn in the barren woman who swallowed its umbilical cord.

Still others call a *sadhu* or *barwa* to pray and recite invocations and *mantras* over them.

Or they go to one of the famous temples along the Nerbudda river and sleep on its premises. This is said to make them fertile.

A magic cure of daily or tertiary malaria is the following: On an auspicious day of the week, either a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday, a *kesari* bug is caught alive. Raw rice grains and *kuku* are poured on it. Then the bug is wrapped into a piece of black cloth and tied with a white thread. Then sweet oil is poured on burning wood coals and the bug is roasted in the smoke of the burning oil. Then it is tied around the ankle of the sick person.

Then the patient must get up, leave the house and break a thorn from a dry thorn bush and throw it away. During the performance the sick person must keep silence. The bag containing the bug is kept on the ankle of the sick person till the string breaks and the bug falls off. Or a *barica* is called to tear the string and take off the bug. The Balahis believe that the fever has passed from the patient to the bug. Only a man can prepare this charm.

If a child dreams heavily or suddenly starts crying during the night, the Balahis believe that the spirit of the roof-beam of the house has frightened the baby. Its father gets up, rubs *kuku* on the roof-beam and the door-post, then scrapes off the dust from the same spots and cuts off a few chips of wood. The whole is roasted in the smoke of a dung-cake burning on a tile taken off the roof of the house. The chips of wood and the dust from the beam are wrapped into a rag and tied with a string around the neck of the frightened child.

Sometimes the scalp-lock of a sick person is cut off and offered to a certain *deo* or *mata*. Or even all the hair is shaved off and offered up, as a substitute for the whole body.

A recipe for curing cats of their bad habit of catching chickens is: Take curd and mix it with fowl's dung (don't take much, else the cat refuses to drink the curd!). After drinking curd prepared in such a manner no cat will ever touch a chicken!

To procure a good voice in children, they are made to eat the flour paste which is smeared on the drum at the centre of the membrane to muffle the tune. It may not taste well, but it is effective.

### (3) Control of Demons

#### (a) The *Janka*<sup>81</sup>

If medicines, vows and supplications are of no avail, the Balahis are convinced that a certain deity or spirit has been offended and in revenge has sent this sickness. The *janka* (medicine man) is called to find out which god or *mata* is responsible for the sickness and what offerings should be performed, to placate the offended deity. The *janka* whom the Balahis consult belongs usually to their own caste, but they are not prevented to consult a *janka* belonging to another caste; it is believed that Bhils, Gonds, and Nahals are experts in this art of healing.

The *janka* enters the house and touches the feet of the patient with joined hands. This greeting is not meant for the patient, but for the *deo* or *mata* who by his (or her) presence in him is causing the disease. Then the *janka* feels with his left hand the pulse of the patient while with his right hand he pulls the fingers of the patient's hand. Each time he mumbles the name of a *mata* or *deo*. The joints of the patient's fingers crack while he is pulling them, and by the number of crackings the *janka* is supposed to find out which *deo* or *mata* has caused the sickness and what offering is demanded for the cure of the patient. The usual demand is for eggs, chickens, or even a goat, combined always with a number of coconuts and other good things.

When the *deo* (or *mata*) responsible for the illness has been found out, the patient is brought to his (or her) shrine. The *janka* and some relatives accompany the patient to the place of worship. If however the patient is unable to walk, the *janka* and the relatives visit the god's image alone.

At the shrine the *janka* recites some *mantras*. The following *mantra* may serve as an example: *Allah, Bismillah, Raheman, Rahim,*

<sup>81</sup>) literally: 'the knowing one'

*Kali, Maha Kali, Brahma ki sali, donon hath se bajawa tali. — Agar yeh kam siddh nahi karega, to teri ma ki nari kholega!*<sup>62</sup>)

Then the *janka* makes from six to seven knots in a red string. After each knot he recites a *mantra* adding some hearty curses (*gali*) at the end as threats. Then an offering is made, the deity worshipped and the string tied around the neck, wrist, or arm of the patient. A meal is served of which the *janka* and the relatives of the patient partake, while the patient himself is not allowed to touch any food served on this occasion. Also young women and children must keep away. The *janka* then asks for his fee, and receives two to four annas, very rarely a rupee. The money is placed on the *arti* (brass plate) on which the offerings had been carried to the *deo* or *mata*.

There are in every village such men and women who diagnose the sickness of a patient in this manner as a matter of profession. Some success increases their reputation as accomplished *janka* enormously, while a failure does not diminish the trust of the people in their power. It is so easy to find an excuse or to blame somebody or something else when a cure has failed.

#### (b) The *Barwa*

A *barwa* is different from a *janka*. The *barwa* claims to be possessed by a *bhut* (superhuman spirit) in whose authority he acts and who speaks through him while a *janka* only uses some natural devices, as the finger-pulling, to find out the sickness and its cure.

Neither the vocation of the *barwa* nor that of the *janka* is hereditary or limited to a certain caste or sex. Anyone, taking a fancy to the mysterious and gifted with a certain mental and psychical aptitude, may be initiated by another wizard into the A B C's of the 'black art'. His future fame depends greatly on his success in cures of the sick.

The Balahis believe that the *barwa* has to make an alliance with a certain *bhut*, i. e. an evil spirit. The *bhut* will tell him the secrets of the other world; he will reveal which *deos* or *matas* have to be worshipped and which offerings to be made to cure a sick person. Often, when a man wants to employ a *barwa* for a cure, he asks him first, as a kind of test, to reveal him his own thoughts.

<sup>62</sup>) Translation: "Allah, Bismillah, Raheman Rahim, Kali, Great Kali, Brahma's sister-in-law, with joined hands I pray: Save! But if you don't cure the patient, I shall pierce the private part of your mother!" The Balahis say that such threats (*gali*) are essential for an efficient prayer, they show the urgency of the case! — Note the strange mixing of Mohammedan and Hindu deities!

With the help of the *bhut*, it is believed, that the *barwa* is able to divine the other man's thoughts.

Some *barwas* enjoy the service of a *pir* (Mohammedan spirit) who fulfils every whim and wish of the *barwa* to the letter. He is able to kill or harm any man in such a way that no suspicion falls on his master. He furnishes anything that the *barwa* may demand from him.

In return for his service the *bhut* demands a solemn sacrifice from the *barwa*, every year at Dasahra. If the *barwa* omits this sacrifice, the *bhut* will certainly kill him.

All Balahis admit that the serving spirit of a *barwa* is an evil one intent on harming men.

The *barwas* whom I have had the opportunity to meet were mostly simple souls who themselves quite sincerely believed in their magical powers. The failure of an attempted cure could not shake their firm confidence in their own ability. But I met also a few *barwas* who frankly admitted, after I had won their confidence, that their cures and devices were a fraud and a deception of credulous people. Some of them knew a few clever tricks with which they used to win the confidence of their clients. These tricks were handed down from father to son, or from master to disciple, and their secret was carefully kept.

A Balahi *sadhu* related to me that his uncle was able to perform the famous conjuring trick with the mango tree which began to grow before the puzzled lookers-on and sprouted leaves and fruits which the *barwa* would pick off and offer to the spectators to taste. He could also manufacture money. But, although reluctantly, the *sadhu* admitted that these performances were tricks. He said that if his uncle could have manufactured money, he would certainly have been a rich man, but he had died in poverty.

Eye-witnesses state that some *barwas* are apparently invulnerable. They claim to have seen a *barwa* bringing an iron chain to white heat and then, stepping into the fire himself, whip his bare back with the chain, without getting hurt. Not even a scar could be seen afterwards.

Also women may possess magic powers. Their serving spirit is a *churel* or a *mata*. It is said that in every village there are some women in connection with the spirit-world. On the day of the Gana-gaur festival they celebrate their spirit's feast. During the procession, they begin to tremble and roll on the ground in convulsions and get into fits, lasting often several days. During this time they are paralyzed and unable to move a limb. After that they slowly recover without the need of any medical help.

This world of the mysterious, of ghosts and demons, *deos* and *matas*, *bhuts* and *churels*, is nothing strange or impossible to the Balahi. He takes it for granted that beings of the invisible other world interfere in his world and he is always on the alert to protect himself by charms and spells, by various offerings and magic practices against the harmful and malignant intentions of the evil spirits. Especially in illness does he call to his assistance the magic power of the *barwa*.

When the relatives of a sick man or woman have decided to consult a *barwa*, a near relative fills his right hand with *joari* grain. With the kernels he puts a paisa into his fist. Then he passes his hand closely along the body of the sick man, from the head down to the feet. Then he goes to the *barwa*, whom he greets saying: "*Bhai, tum abhi baidha karo* (Brother, let us have a seance). My relative is sick."

The *barwa* warms water and takes a bath. Then he spreads a clean sheet on the floor and places the image of his *deo* on it. It is a small brass image of his favourite *deo* or *mata*. In front of it he puts a stool with very short legs, which is called *bajut*. He squats down on it. The relative of the sick man opens his hands and pours the *joari*-grains and the paisa on the floor within the *barwa's* reach. Now the *barwa* begins to pray and to invoke his *deo*. He burns *kapur* (camphor) and often *ganja* (hemp) over a fire in front of him. Holding his hands over the fire, and inhaling the smoke of the incense, he works himself into a trance, swaying gently to and fro. Three times he passes his hands over his body from head to foot. Incessantly he recites *mantras* till the *deo* takes possession of him. His whole body begins to shake and to tremble, sweat pours out of all pores. He sings and rolls his eyes and writhes in convulsion, supported by his attendants.

The trance of the *barwa* may be a result of self-hypnotism, and partly of the inhaled *kapur* and *ganja*-smoke. Usually it does not seem to be deception or fraud. Some *barwas* are, in my opinion, incapable of deceit and themselves believe firmly in their own magical powers. They maintain that they are not fully conscious of what they do and say. They see persons and things as from a distance and greatly reduced in size. They believe that a *deo* whom they call *bhut* or *sheitan* takes possession of them and uses them as his medium.

Another man takes *kuku* from a brass plate, and rubbing his thumb from the *barwa's* nose upwards, paints his forehead with the sacred paint. All who are present shout: *Jai!* (Hail!) They cheer the *deo* who has taken possession of the *barwa*. He, squatting on his *bajut* and trembling in all his limbs, takes a few grains of *joari* from the pile on the floor and says: "*Admi ko bolta lokhria!*" That means that during the performance the word for 'man' is *lokhria*, for 'woman' *sahi*. A boy is called *bala* and a girl *bali*.

The patient's relative asks: "Deo Baba, of which disease is my brother suffering?" With two fingers the *barwa* then takes a few kernels of *joari* and throws them into a *lota* filled with water. The *lota* of a *barwa* is called: *kalas*. The grains swimming on the surface of the water form some figures, which are interpreted by the *barwa*. He announces the disease from which the man or woman is suffering, what god has to be invoked, and which offerings have to be made.

For example he may say: *Banha hawar*. This is the *deo* of the *ghat*, usually called *Ghatwala*, whose abode is a stone in a *nala* or at any steep place of a road. It often happens that at such a place the bullocks stop and stubbornly refuse to go on. Or a wheel breaks and the whole cart turns upside down. The accidents can be explained quite naturally, but people suspect the intrigues of a mocking or malign spirit behind them. Thus they paint a huge stone near the dangerous place with vermilion and worship it as the *Ghatwala*, the god of the *ghat*. They offer a handful of grain, a pinch of tobacco or a fruit and lo! the bullocks walk on, the over-turned cart is reloaded sooner than expected, or a near-by villager may lend a spare wheel.

Now the *barwa* takes a red thread, cuts off three pieces which he gives to the patient's relative. These threads, called *gen*, are tied around the waist, upper arm and neck of the patient. The relative inquires also which offerings should be made to reconcile the spirit of the *ghat*. The *barwa*, usually taking into consideration the wealth of his client, names some articles for which he uses quite uncommon words: liquor which he calls: *darpan*, a cock (*pankya* — the winged), then eggs, coconuts, *badam*, *singora*, *kola saphed*, and other ingredients. All these offerings are brought to the *Ghatwala*'s stone. The offering is performed by the *barwa* who afterwards may keep the offerings for himself.

Then the relative of the patient asks the *barwa* what the patient may eat for the time of his sickness. Usually the *barwa* forbids him to eat *khira* (cucumber), *urad ki dal* (pulse), rice, and oil. The *barwa* is quite positive that he cannot be held responsible for the failure of his cure unless these restrictions are observed to the letter! But Balahis do not care much about restrictions, especially when they are sick, thus the *barwa* is usually well provided with an excuse when his performance proves unsuccessful.

There is an abundance of evil and malign spirits, *deos* and *matas*, which cause sickness and death. It is the difficult task of the *barwa* to find out which spirit has caused the disease and how the offended deity can be conciliated and which offerings have to be performed. Unless the *barwa* finds out all these things, the patient cannot recover.

## (c) The Demons and their Propitiation

Next to the *Ghatwala deo* whose propitiation has been described above, the Balahis are especially afraid of Masan, the god of the graveyard. It is believed that this evil spirit is especially dangerous to children who therefore are never allowed to go near a grave.

Another dangerous *bhut* is Matya who causes paralysis.

The Danoi or Balish causes pneumonia (*sanipat*).

These evil spirits are exorcised in much the same manner as the *Ghatwala deo*.

## Sitala Mata

Small-pox is caused by the dreaded Sitala-mata, or *mata mai*. She is represented by several formless stones, covered with vermillion. The *mata* is worshipped during an attack of small-pox. An offering of boiled rice, curd, and a coconut is made with the promise of the sacrifice of a goat or fowl, if the disease subsides. On the day of fulfilment of the vow, the villagers proceed to the image of the *mata*, make their offering and then return to the village, where the *patel* (village headman) gives a festive banquet. The expenses of the offering and the banquet are covered by a collection (*chandai*) to which all villagers contribute.

Sitala Mata is also invoked by barren women to obtain the blessing of offspring. Expecting mothers also visit her to obtain a healthy child.

For such an offering the women go singing in procession to the *mata*. One woman carries a brass plate with offerings, a coconut with spices, grain, fruits and flowers around it. The *pujari* of the village, usually a Brahman, takes the offering, listens to the prayer of the woman and then breaks the coconut on the sacred stones. A small portion of the coconut is put down beside the stones, the rest is distributed among the worshippers or taken by the *pujari*. The heaps of coconut shells around every *mata* are witnesses of the *devi's* popularity. Often a miniature *palang* is offered for the purpose of obtaining offspring.

In time of cholera, a *hela* (buffalo-calf) is purchased. It is worshipped by the village-*patel* and taken through the village and around outside it. Then the *patel* sacrifices the animal in honour of Mata Marai, the goddess of cholera. The victim's head is buried on the boundary of the village to keep the sickness away; the meat goes to the *kotwal*, who distributes it among his fellow Balahis and other low-caste people.

Till the offering is performed, all villagers must fast. No fire may be kindled and no meal prepared within the village boundaries.

## Churel

No *bhut* is more dreaded by the Balahis than the *churel*. A *churel* is the ghost of a woman who has died in child-birth. *Churels* are of two classes, the ghosts of women who die while pregnant, and those who actually die in child-birth. The latter are the more dangerous, especially when their death falls at the time of Diwali, the harvest festival.

A *churel* may change her appearance as she pleases. To young women and mothers she appears as an old, ugly woman with hanging breasts, protruding teeth and disordered matted hair. In this attire she brings disease and death to any woman who has the misfortune to meet her. In the dead of night the *churel* haunts the back-yards of the houses and frightens the girls and women. To men she appears as an attractive young woman, beckoning and enticing them to make love to her. But woe to the man who is deceived by her! For the *churel* takes all his virile strength from him and makes him waste away. Only a powerful magician can help against her spell. Fortunately a *churel* can always easily be recognised as such, for her feet are turned backwards.

To prevent a woman dying in child-birth from becoming a *churel*, various means are employed. Small round-headed nails are driven through her finger-nails, and special care is taken at her burial to avert the danger of her return to her former home. Powerful charms are recited to save the family from this malignant spirit.

The exorcism of a *churel* is more complicated and difficult than that of any other *bhut*. Only a powerful *barua* can perform it. When he has to perform the exorcism of a *churel*, he comes to the sick man (or woman)'s house. He squats down before him (or her) in mute observation. Then he orders someone to bring a burning dung-cake. The sick person must bend over the fire into which he has cast some spices, and inhale its smoke. A sheet is thrown over the patient, in such a way that it also covers the fire so that the smoke cannot escape. Inhaling deeply, the patient soon begins to tremble. This is a sign that the *churel* has entered his body.

Sometimes the patient is placed within the iron tyre of a cart-wheel. Then the spirit has no power to harm him. Should the tyre be taken off during the exorcism, the patient would be killed instantly. It happened a few years ago at Aulia, a village near Pandhana, that a patient, walking within the protective circle of a tyre, was brought to the *mata's* stone, where the *barua* intended to finish his exorcism. While the men were walking on the path, suddenly a cobra crossed their way. The men who carried the tyre got frightened and nearly dropped it. Only Gossain, an old Balahi, kept his head

and managed to kill the snake with a stroke of his stick, imploring meanwhile the men not to drop the tyre. Gossain who related the event later was convinced that the patient would have been killed by the spirit whom they were going to exorcise, had he left the protective range of the tyre.

When the patient begins to tremble, the *barwa* recites some formulas (*mantra*) to make the spirit more compliant. Then he asks some questions as: "Who are you?" The sheet which covers the patient is not taken off until the spirit condescends to answer through the mouth of the sick person. Often for lack of air the patient gets dizzy and half-unconscious, or starts to vomit. But the *barwa* is adamant. If the *churel* is too stubborn and refuses to answer, a hair-whip is applied. At last the *barwa* gets a reply and passes on to the question as to what offerings are required for the cure of the patient. The *churel* reluctantly, but compelled by the magic power of the *barwa*, discloses the conditions under which she is prepared to depart from the patient. At last, compelled by the powerful *mantras* of the *barwa* and the assistance of his personal *deo*, the *churel* promises to leave her victim if the offerings are performed.

Now the *barwa* takes off the sheet with which the patient had up to this been covered and takes a shoe or sandal and puts it into the patient's mouth. Holding the *barwa*'s shoe between his teeth, he is led to a tree. He is told to touch the tree with his head and at the same time to open his mouth so that the shoe falls to the ground. The *barwa* grasps the hair or scalp-lock of the patient and drives a nail through it into the tree. Then he cuts the hair off closely near the head. At this moment the *churel* is believed to leave her victim and to enter the tree. The patient falls down to the ground, unconscious. When he is aroused from his fit, he is cured. He may be very weak for some time, but there is no relapse into his old sickness.

The *barwa* receives a handsome present for his exorcism. It certainly is a hard strain on him, physically as well as mentally. He is indeed often quite exhausted after his performance.

### *Jalparai*

Another demon who causes gonorrhoea is called *Jalparai*. A man or woman, suffering from this disease, goes to a river or pond in the vicinity. There he (or she) takes a bath and changes all his clothes. Even the silver ornaments which a woman wears she must wash thoroughly. The clothes are thrown away or, if still fit for wearing, are simply washed and taken home again. After that an offering is made. The patient is not allowed to eat meat, *urad ki dal*, or rice until the cure is accomplished.

## Magic Cures of Sick Children

Children too are brought to the *barwa* when they are sick. If the sickness is serious and the child's father is able to pay for the great exorcism, the *barwa* will perform it. Otherwise he only feels the pulse of the sick child. This feeling of the pulse is called *panch chakrya*. The *barwa* diagnoses the case and says, for instance, that the child is *dakni*, which means that its liver is in disorder. But for a Balahi this is rather a vague expression, because 'liver' has many different meanings in the language of the people.

To cure the child, the *barwa* places the child on its back. He presses his open mouth to the child's stomach and pretends to suck the evil spirit out of the body. He spits out vigorously several times. Then he ties an amulet around the child's neck. This amulet is called *tait* and has the form of a tiny flat square box. It is of silver or tin, and contains usually a piece of a root, wrapped in paper on which a *mantra* is written. On the outside of the cover the picture of a *deo* is imprinted. These amulets can be bought, together with a red string, in the bazaar. The *barwa* ties five or seven knots into the string while he recites several *mantras*. The *barwa's* fee is a few annas or a coconut.

If a child suffers from convulsions, a female magician is consulted. She is called *mata*. The woman makes an offering before a small brass figure, which represents her tutelary god (*bija sani*) and then ties an amulet around the neck of the child. On the cover of the amulet are imprinted the figures of five or seven *matas*.

But these amulets are believed effective only for about a year; later they must be renewed. However, if the child falls sick before the year is over, the *mata* is again called and ties another amulet around the child's neck. Sometimes children wear several amulets as a protective against different diseases that might befall them.

## (4) Witch-Craft

The *barwa* is not only employed to cure the sick, he knows also how to cast a spell on one's enemies, so that they get sick and waste away, unless another, more powerful, *barwa* casts a counter-spell. This kind of sickness cannot be cured by natural medicine.

The following device shows a way of making away with one's enemies: The *barwa* takes an earthen pot or forms one out of mud specially for this purpose. He recites certain *mantras* over it, and curses strongly against the enemy whom he wants to destroy. Then he paints the pot with vermilion and buries it at night near the enemy's house at a spot over which the latter is sure to step. As

soon as this happens, the man will get sick and die. Sometimes the *barua* takes a lemon or a piece of root instead of a pot.

Another device is the following: the *barua* boils a handful of rice, pours sour milk over it and puts the mixture on the path which the enemy frequently uses. Of course during the whole performance *mantras* and curses are recited against the enemy. If he steps on the charm, he will soon get sick and die.

The Balahis believe firmly in the effectiveness of such spells and relate many examples to prove it. I quote some eye-witnesses.

"In a village near Khandwa a young man had fallen in love with a young widow. Being a good dancer and singer, he easily won the widow's heart. But another man, who also took a fancy to her, gained her mother's consent to marry her. But the young widow did not want him and eloped with her lover. It is said that the disappointed mother spoke a terrible curse over the couple. The lovers settled down at Sirpur where I met them. Shortly after their arrival the man got sick. One leg swelled up to the knee, no medicines were of avail. For three months the man tried every medicine, but without improvement. Soon also his wife fell ill of the same mysterious disease. Both were lying helplessly in their house, unable to work, under great pains. The man always claimed that the disease was an effect of his mother-in-law's curse. I tried to dissuade him, but the young man at last called a *barua*. After a great exorcism the couple really got better and were cured in a short time. This happened in 1939 at Sirpur."

"In the same year villagers often came to me complaining that somebody had made a pile of boiled rice mixed with curd on a much frequented road in the village. This happened a few times. One day I sent my servant to Khar (the nearest bazaar) on horse-back. He returned very late, and I saw at once that something was wrong with him. He told me the following story: "Saheb, don't be angry, that I come so late. Hear, what has happened: My horse must have stepped over that infamous pile of rice! Shortly after I had left the village, I lost the road. I, who have gone to Khar so often at any time of day and night, took the wrong direction. When I came through Sukwa, which lies quite out of the way, I thought I was in Khar and wondered that I did not find the shops. The villagers thought that I was drunk. It took them a long time to persuade me that I was not in Khar. They had to take the reins of my horse and lead it on the right way. On my arrival there I did not recognise where I was. A caste-fellow met me wandering aimlessly through the village. He helped me along, bought me what I had come for and send me on the right way home. I would certainly have lost the way again. Only when I entered this village, my eyes opened

wide and I recognized my house. Saheb, I assure you, I am not sick and I was not drunk." All the villagers believed every word of his narration and blamed the infamous pile of rice for it all.

The Balahis take ghosts and *bhuts* rather seriously. There are not a few who claim to have made the acquaintance of evil spirits. They maintain that *bhuts* do not seldom appear as human beings.

"At Dhangaon, 10 miles north of Kandwa a young lovely Balahi woman went to the near river to take a bath and to wash her clothes. All of a sudden a very handsome man appeared and made love to her. As she was alone and nobody near to come to her assistance, she was overpowered. The following night, when she went to bed with her husband, the same man entered her house, gave her husband a mighty kick that threw him off the bed, and himself slept with the woman. She did not mind and was not afraid, because the intruder had the appearance of her husband. In the course of time he often came at night, disappearing at dawn. After nine months a boy was born. When the story leaked out, the whole village smiled knowingly and could not be convinced that the nightly visitor was a *bhut*. But on the day of the boy's marriage, when his father tied the wedding *pagri* on the boy's head, he was suddenly thrown aside, a stranger appeared and tied the bridegroom's head-gear. He vanished into nothingness before the astonished villagers could recover their wits. This boy, whose name is Kalu, is now a man of 50 years and still alive at Dhangaon. The *bhut's* name was Ratan Baba."

A man of Sehara related the following story: At Sehara (6 miles north of Khandwa) lived a Balahi named Bhika, son of Gansya. Four years ago he saw on the way home from Jaswari a being of superhuman size sitting on a tree. As he was passing by, the *bhut* climbed down and asked for tobacco. Bhika had none and told the *bhut* so. But the latter got angry and began to beat him. The poor Balahi started running and tried to get away, but the *bhut* chased him right home to Sehara showering continual blows on his back. Often he stumbled and fell, but fear gave him strength to rise again and run. The whole village gathered together, when they saw the man coming home, bleeding, crying and groaning under the blows. They could not see the *bhut*, but they saw the effect of his rage on the poor Balahi's body. The villagers called a *barwa*. He felt the man's pulse. When the *barwa* touched him, Bhika shrunk back and protested vehemently against the *barwa's* examination. And while he was speaking, he began to spit blood. The *barwa* took this as a sign that the *bhut* had entered the man. At once he cut his scalp-lock. At that Bhika flared up and shouted: "Why did you cut my scalp-lock? By what right did you do it?" After some time

he said quietly, "I shall leave this man after six months, but I must get good meals, every day *laddu*".

The *barwa* promised to feed him well. He performed the great exorcism. After he had driven the nail through Bhika's hair into the tree and cut his locks, the man fell down in a fit like a log. With the greatest difficulty he was revived. Although a strong man before, he was now only a shadow of his old self, nothing but skin and bones. The relatives nursed him with great care. But after a few months they got tired and decided to bring the ailing man to Khandwa to the hospital. The *barwa* anxiously tried to dissuade them. He said that Bhika would get all right after six months, but the *bhut* would kill him, if they applied any medicine.

But Bhika's relatives would not listen. They made a bullock-cart ready, and made the patient comfortable on it. Four men sat with him on the same cart, to protect him against all assaults of the *bhut*. But when they reached the Baldi River, Bhika was suddenly lifted up by invisible hands, carried swiftly through the air and hurled from a great height down into the river. The man was already dead when they reached the river." This happened four years ago and the narrators, Rathan, Kotwal of Sehara, and Narsingh, a Balahi *sadhu* of the same village, were eyewitnesses.

The same Rathan related another story: Years ago, when he was a boy of 14 years, he was working in the garden of a Mohammedan. In the evening when he walked home, he met a small girl who addressed him, saying: "Where are you going? He replied: "Home". She said, "I will come with you." Ratan did not know the girl and found it strange that she wanted to accompany him. But she went ahead and the boy followed. It was getting dark. Suddenly the girl stopped at a well and told him, to take a bath. He refused and walked on. Five times the girl stopped him, but the boy did not listen and hastened to get away from her. At last the girl said: "Well, if you don't want to listen, go home". At this moment the boy got blind, he also lost his bearings and did not know how to get home. There were many wells in the gardens and he was in great danger of being drowned, so he began to shout for help. A Rajput who was himself a *barwa* found the boy and brought him home and told his parents: "Don't give him anything to eat. A *bhut* is in him." He recited some *mantras* and the boy got soon alright and recovered his sight. He himself related the story.

Narsingh, a Balahi *Sadhu*, related what had happened to his brother: He got sick of pneumonia. A few days earlier a man had been run over by a train at Sehara and killed. So he went to the spot where the man had died, and placed a bottle of liquor on the rails. Then he sat down beside it and waited. Three times he

heard a grunting sound and got frightened. After a while he took courage and examined the bottle. He found it empty, although he had corked it up carefully. The cork had not been touched. But he was cured from all his pains from that minute. The spirit of the man, run-over by the train, had accepted his offering and cured him of his sickness.

When Narsingh got married, a *bhut* could be seen by the whole marriage-party, sitting in a tree near the house. But the wedding-guests could perceive only the legs planted firmly against the branches, head and body were invisible.

Narsingh maintains, and many Balahis who listened to his stories confirm it, that young boys and girls are often enticed away by *bhuts*. They disappear suddenly and are never found again. People believe that they are taken to the abode of the *bhuts* and are forced to live with them.

Another *bhut* appears to travellers at night. He stops the bullock-carts. When the driver beats his bullocks, the *bhut* appears as a giant and in a threatening posture stops him. The bullocks shy, but will not walk on till dawn.

Jathing, a *bhut* in the form of an *ignis fatuus*, is apt to seduce travellers. They see a light in the night, follow it and lose their way hopelessly. Near Sirpur the villagers often see such a will-o'-the-wisp. Once I was called to observe it when it appeared about 100 yards away in the fields. I saw a white light similar to the light of a strong electric torch. I persuaded some villagers to come with me and to find out the origin of this light. But it always kept at about the same distance from us, either in front of us, or at our right or left side. Up to this day I do not know who fooled us so. It is improbable that somebody used a torch to play the ghost because to my knowledge nobody in that part of the country was at that time in possession of such a modern and expensive article as an electric torch. But the light which I saw could certainly not have come from a lantern fed with kerosene oil.

I came across another event which illustrates how dangerous it is to fool a ghost. At Sirpur an old man got dangerously sick. He sent to Sukwi for a *barwa*, who promised to cure him if he bought a cock and set it free in the jungle. The patient bought the cock and really got well. But then he regretted that he must let the cock loose in the jungle as he had promised and he sold it instead to two Balahis. They killed the cock and divided the meat between themselves. But the next day all three men got sick, the man who had broken his promise and sold the cock died after a month's illness, while the two men who had bought and eaten the bird recovered after a prolonged sickness. The villagers are convinced that the *bhut* of the *barwa* took revenge for this break of promise.

### Snake Bites and Scorpion Stings

The Balahis not only believe that the *barwa* can cure diseases through his magic power or the assistance of his tutelary *deo*, they are also convinced that certain *barwas* can cure a person bitten by a poisonous snake or stung by a scorpion. But they admit that it requires exceptional power to render snake-poison harmless. It seems that the Balahis, as many other Hindus, are ignorant of the fact that by far not all species of snakes are poisonous. It may well happen therefore that a person, bitten by a non-poisonous snake, shows through mere fright all symptoms of snake-poisoning. In such a case the *barwa* would be able by his impressive and convincing ritual to eliminate the effects of shock rather than of actual poisoning. I have questioned a good number of eye-witnesses of cures accomplished by a *barwa*, but these eye-witnesses could not prove it in a single case that the snake which had bitten the person had indeed been poisonous. On the other hand I have also heard of several cases in which *barwas* were unable to save the life of persons who had certainly been bitten by poisonous snakes.

The procedure in a cure from snake-bite is the following: The patient is brought before the shrine of Hanuman and covered with *nim* (*Melia azadirachta indica*) leaves. Then an offering of the usual ingredients as *kuku*, *sendhur*, incense sticks etc., is made. Reciting *mantras* the *barwa* passes his palms over the arms and legs of the patient down to the fingertips and toes. Then massaging the patient's limbs, he pretends to drive the poison slowly down to the fingers and toes and, by the spell of his powerful *mantra*, removes the poison completely from the body. During this exorcism he is in a trance.

*Barwas* who claim to have power over snake-poison must be strong and healthy men because their cure requires great mental and physical exertion. The *barwa* is said to acquire his magical power by abstaining from certain kinds of food (meat, for instance). He, also, may not drink 'living water', i. e., water that comes from the sky in the form of rain or out of the earth in a spring or river.

There are *barwas* who claim the power of stilling the pain resulting from the sting of a scorpion. Repeating his *mantra* several times, the *barwa* passes his palm lightly over the arm or leg of the patient, driving the poison away from the heart towards the wound. There usually the pain is intensely felt for several hours. But the *barwa* is able to take away all pain in a few minutes.

Some *barwas* maintain that they can conjure the pain of a person who has been stung into another person who then feels the same pain as if he had been stung by a scorpion. There are many eye-witnesses who assured me of having seen such magic cures. I myself have been personally present at only one case, but on that occasion the *mantras* of the *barwa* were of no avail.

## Hidden Treasures

The Balahis are rather keen on treasure-hunting, though not much is heard of their ever finding any. Treasures are discovered by magical divination; their recovery is usually a difficult affair which requires a number of intricate magical devices, to protect the treasure-hunters against the ghostly guardians of such treasures. If a certain magic rite has been omitted, the treasure may disappear before the very eyes of the diggers, or else the men who disturb the peace of the guardian-spirits of the treasure will get sick and die shortly afterwards even if they have succeeded in recovering it.

At a village in the Nimar District local tradition maintained that at a certain place near a *nala* treasures were hidden. The owner of the field had often found coins when he ploughed, and old people remembered that formerly the village had been laid out on that spot and only recently been shifted to its present site, a drier and healthier location during the monsoon.

A Balahi, Balchand by name, was anxious to obtain these treasures of which he had heard so much. He secured a charm from a Mohammedan *fakir* (beggar) which was supposed to enable a *panwaria* (person born with legs foremost) to detect silver and gold lying buried under the ground. Balchand, after a long search, found a Balahi boy at Roshnai (near Khandwa) who fulfilled this condition.

On a dark night he took the boy out to the spot where the treasure was supposed to be. He rubbed the boy's eyes with the charm, and the boy really saw a huge box full of silver and jewels, and a smaller box filled with gold coins. But on the boxes four men were sitting, who guarded the treasure: One man was a Mohammedan *fakir*, the other an Aghor (member of a caste feeding on corpses), the two others he could not make out. The *fakir* warned the boy to leave the place at once and not to dig for the treasure, else he would get sick and die. The boy got frightened and ran away. Balchand could never persuade him or any other *panwaria* to assist him in digging for the treasure. People still believed it to be hidden on the same spot.

Enquiries made regarding this local tradition resulted in finding that years ago a Mohammedan *fakir* had died near this place and was buried there. His spirit is believed to wander about and disturb the sleep of the watchmen who stay over night on their fields guarding the crops. One day a man came to me and complained that the *fakir* was coming to him every other night, sitting on his chest and persuading him to turn Mohammedan. The spirit was said to appear in the shape of a Mohammedan *fakir*, but only two feet tall. The

man who had complained to me got sick soon afterwards and died. He seemed to suffer from asthma, but all the villagers believed that the ghost of the *fakir* had killed him.

### Eclipse of Sun and Moon

The eclipse of the sun or moon is caused, according to the Hindu tradition, by the death of the demon Rahu who was killed by the gods. The Balahis know no other explanation. They are much afraid and excited on such a day and hide themselves in their huts. They fast, because no fire is lighted to cook a meal, all the water pots are emptied, the water is poured away. They all go to the *nala* or well and take a bath. Wealthy Balahis give alms to beggars or Brahmans.

It is a busy day for the *barwas* and *sadhus*. As long as the eclipse lasts, they are busy learning *mantras* against snake-bites and scorpion stings. Learning such *mantras* by heart on such a day gives them the power to remove the poison from the body through recitation of the *mantras*. It is important for the effectiveness of these *mantras* to keep one's mind and imagination on a snake or scorpion.

The spots in the moon are interpreted by the Balahis as an old woman spinning, or they hold with the common Hindu tradition that the spots are the *dhoti* which a god threw at the moon when he found his wife unfaithful.

### The Railroad

Some simple Balahis along the railroad worship the iron rails along the line in the conviction, that the train is propelled by the help of Kali Mata.

Another Deo, important for the progress of the train, is Topya Deo, the signal pole. Whenever a train approaches, his *topi* (hat) falls down, therefore the Deo's name: Topya Deo. He is supposed to draw the train near to him and to urge it farther. *Kuku* is applied to the signal pole, and a coconut is broken in honour of Topya Deo.

## Chapter XXIII

### Vows and Supplications

In times of sickness, a pilgrimage to a famous temple, or to a certain fair (*mela*), or to a renowned *sadhu* may be promised. After having regained health, the vow is conscientiously fulfilled. Otherwise the gods would take revenge.

(1) *Tola dan*

When a child becomes dangerously ill, the anxious parents make a vow to offer up the child's weight in grain, *gur* (unrefined sugar) or coconuts. The vow is made to the deity who supposedly has caused the disease or who has the power to cure the child.

The vow is made in the following manner: The father (sometimes the mother) goes to the village well and takes a bath. Then, without changing his wet clothes, he goes to the shrine or image of the deity, whom he wants to invoke. He takes along with him a *tola* full of water and a long red thread, which has not been used before for any other purpose. He pours water over the image of the deity and waves the thread in his tightly closed hand several times in circles over the idol. Then he ties five or seven knots in the thread. This done, he worships and prays hard for the recovery of his sick child. Upon his return, he ties the thread around the neck, upper arm or waist of his child. Then he makes the solemn promise to offer at a certain date after the child's recovery its full weight in grain, *gur* or coconuts.

The vow is fulfilled at the stipulated time after the child's complete recovery, or more conveniently after the harvest, when there is a little money in the house, or on the day of the child's marriage. It is called *tola dan* (the weighing).

I had once the opportunity to watch the fulfilling of such a vow. When I was passing through a village near Khandwa, I saw a crowd of women and a few men standing before a house. I inquired what was going on. They told me that some months ago, during the small-pox epidemic, a boy of the family had caught the disease. The parents had made the vow, in case of his recovery, to offer his weight in *joari* flour to Sitala mata, the dreaded goddess of small-pox. The boy got well. Today the *tola dan* ceremony was to be performed. Friends and relatives of the family and the villagers had assembled at the house to take part in the celebration. I decided to stay and watch the ceremony.

Soon the parents of the child came out of their hut. A woman relative, not the mother, took the child, a nice plump boy of about five years, on her hip. The women started singing a hymn in honour of Sitala mata. The song had a very pleasant simple melody. One woman was leading, while the other women repeated the introductory verse which was sung as the refrain after every new verse. The verses are often extemporized. Some women are very clever at it. Slowly the crowd stirred and in loose groups the procession started moving. The men were walking a little apart from the women, talking among themselves. They carried bamboo sticks, some ropes and a bag of

*joari* flour. On arriving at the Sitala mata's idol, a heap of stones, painted with vermilion, under a leafy *pipal* tree, the women squatted down on their heels. The singing became somewhat confused, but the leading singer carried on and soon they were canting again with full throats.

Next the men got busy. They tied the bamboo sticks together into a pyramid and fastened a balance on the top. In one scale the little boy was placed, in the other the bag of *joari* flour. The little boy watched every movement of the crowd with serious, wide-open eyes. Not a shade of a smile passed over his face. But luckily he was not afraid and did not start crying.

As it happened, the flour was not sufficient. A hot dispute arose, one blaming the other for this lack of foresight. At last a boy ran home to bring some more. The women also stopped singing and began to chat, till one started another song which was taken up by a group of young women. When the boy arrived with the flour, the *nai* painted the little boy, the scale, and also the bag of *joari* with *kuku*. When the scales balanced evenly, the boy was gently lifted off and returned to the woman who had previously carried him in the procession. The bag of *joari* was taken down and placed before the *mata* stones. Then a coconut was broken and offered to the goddess, incense burnt and the *mata* stones painted with *kuku*. The women meanwhile were singing incessantly with increasing strength and emotion.

Then a white sheet was spread on the ground before the *mata* stones. The boy was sat down on the sheet and his clothes stripped off. The barber now began to dress him. The boy got a new *dhotti* (loincloth), a brand new shirt and a gaily-coloured waist coat. A white and red *pagri* (turban) was tied on his clean-shaven head. The child took everything with becoming dignity. It made me smile. When the dressing was over, another shirt was brought. Without hesitation the *nai* put the second shirt over the waist-coat and tied a new turban-cloth over the first one. Then at last he laid a second loincloth round the shoulders of the boy whose grave face was nearly buried under the clothes. Now the child's father took off his shoes, and stepped on the sheet. He removed his shirt and tied a new loincloth, loosening the old one under the cover of the new one. He also slipped into a new shirt and the *nai* tied a new *pagri* of white and red cloth on his head. Then the women took the mother of the boy in their midst. She changed her brassiere and her *lagra* (main garment of Balahi women) first putting on the new *lagra* and then taking off the old one. The whole changing of clothes was done in public, but without any trace of immodesty.

Then the *nai* painted the forehead of the boy with *kuku*, applying the paint by rubbing his thumb from the nose upwards. After the boy had thus been marked, his father was painted and then the other men, all in the same manner. The women applied the paint to one another themselves. This done, the *nai* took the brassplate with the ingredients for the offering and presented it to the father of the boy who put an anna on it. After him the other men gave one or two paisas. The *nai* counted the money and found that he deserved more. Again he presented the plate to every man, pleading that he had stopped his field work to attend the ceremony and that he should get at least his daily wages. Reluctantly the boy's father put another paisa on the plate, also one or the other of the men added a coin. Some pretended not to hear, others said that he had got enough. And so it seemed. With evident satisfaction the *nai* counted his collection and tied it carefully into a corner of his turban.

Now the whole crowd got up. The women began to sing a few couplets. Then the father of the boy broke into a cheering which he repeated twice. He shouted: *Sitala mata ki jai!* and the crowd answered: *Jai* (Hail!) After which they all returned home, gaily chatting. The women intoned a new song. They are inexhaustible and untiring on such occasions. At home the men got busy preparing the sacrificial meal. They baked a heap of cakes of *joari* in *ghi*. As additional dish *gur* was served. Late in the evening the villagers assembled, each bringing his own brassplate along and a *lota* full of water. They sat down in rows, the women apart from the men. The dim light of a few lanterns threw phantastic shadows over the gaily prattling dinner party, the boys smacking their lips in expectation of a tasty meal. The waiters ran busily through the lines, some distributing the round flat cakes, others putting a few crumbs of *gur* on the plates. Now the host passed through the lines, touched the ground before his guests and then his own forehead with folded hands, as a sign of salutation. I confess that on that occasion I admired the capacity of a Balahi's stomach. The little boys seemed especially voracious. They took a second and a third helping, at intervals patting their plump little bellies with complacency. After having had their fill, they all got up, rinsed their mouths, washed their hands and went home without any further ceremony.

## (2) The *dand* Ceremony

Sometimes instead of the *tola-dan*, another vow is made which is called *dand* (penance). This ceremony bears the character of a penance and is usually performed by the mother of the child. Accompanied by a crowd of women, sometimes even by a music band, the mother as she leaves the home kneels down on the ground. She

touches the ground with her forehead, then, folding her hands she gets up, supported by a relative at either side. A man marks the spot which her hands had reached. On this spot the woman prostrates herself again in full length. In this manner she covers with her own body the whole distance up to the *mata's* stone.

Not seldom her hands are tied with a string. Or a kind of wooden handcuffs is used, namely, a board with two holes in it. The woman puts her hands through the holes in the board and thus performs the penance. This is considered by the Hindus as an act of great humiliation and an acknowledgement of the supremacy of the goddess. It is also an expression of humble gratitude for the recovery of her child. Like all Hindus, the Balahis firmly believe that this performance is very meritorious and all the women of the village are anxious to take part in it.

The woman falls again in front of the *mata* on her knees, touches the ground with her forehead, and then gets up, with folded hands. She takes the brass plate with the usual ingredients for an offering (coconut, *kuku*, *sendhur*, lemons, incense sticks and so on) and new clothes for herself. She puts the plate down on the platform before the *mata*. Then she changes her clothes. Her old ones are at once given away to some poor woman, or quietly taken home by a relative, where they are washed and used again. This changing of clothes is an expression of festive joy. With the fulfilment of this vow the woman is released of a heavy burden. Now she feels as one new-born, as another woman. When she has dressed during which time the women keep on singing, a man steps forward and breaks the coconuts, burns the incense, and paints the *mata* stones with *kuku* and *sendhur*. Now they all worship the *mata*. A piece of the offered coconuts is laid down before the *mata* stones on the platform, the rest is distributed among the worshippers.

After cheering the *mata* three times, all return to the village. The women begin to sing a hymn. But it is now rather difficult for the leader to keep the chorus of women in unison, as the whole procession has broken up into loose groups, talking noisily. At the house of the celebrating family they all gather again and squat down on their heels, waiting patiently for a meal which will be served after some time. Only those may partake of the meal who have accompanied the woman doing penance to the *mata's* shrine.

These undoubtedly very ancient and touching ceremonies show that a child is a great treasure for a Balahi family. But alas, it happens only too often that even such vows are of no avail. *Matas* and *bhuts* throw their spell on so many babies who wither away, and not even a propitiation which is offered with such pathetic rites can appease the envy and malice of the dreadful *matas* and *bhuts*.

### (3) Fertility Rites

It is to be expected that many magical rites are performed to secure fertility of the fields, especially at the times of sowing and harvesting. Balahi farmers follow the practice common among all the Hindus of the country in this matter. The great cults of the Earth-Mother, peculiar to the Balahis, have already been mentioned, here only such rites will be described as accompany sowing and harvesting.

#### At Sowing

In the Nimar the sowing season begins in the second half of June, after Mirag (14 days after Jeth Sudri). On the evening previous to the first sowing day the Balahi farmers go with the *pirana* (goat for driving bullocks) to their fields. There the *pirana* is painted with *kuku*. Then the farmer takes the *pirana* in one hand, and a handful of *joari* grains in the other. Digging up the ground with the *pirana* he sows some *joari* grains in the furrow. This done, he returns home. At home the house is decorated with Mango leaves, also at the *kala* (threshing floor). Mango leaves are hung on strings around the place. These leaves are believed to bring luck and a rich harvest to house and grain-barn.

High-caste farmers like to employ Balahi field-labourers for the sowing of their fields. They believe that the crops will grow well if Balahis do the sowing. And the Balahis too are very keen on doing this kind of field-work.

On the day of the first sowing the farmers first of all take a good meal. For them it is a joyful day. All feel happy to begin the field-work after months of idleness and starvation. With the sowing season the time of work and employment begins, and unemployment and need come to an end.

For the first sowing the farmers dress in new clothes, if possible; the women wear jewels. Men and women paint their foreheads with *kuku*, the bullocks are given a good feeding and they are decorated with gaily coloured head-strings and a necklace of brass-bells. The men drive the bullocks and lead the *tiffan* (sowing plough), while the women sow. A widow should not be allowed to begin the sowing, but later she may help. If sufficient girls and married women are not available for the sowing, unmarried boys can take their place. A widow is not allowed to paint her forehead with *kuku* when she goes to work.

During the sowing season the women do not paint their eyes with *kajal* (lamp-black, a very popular and cheap cosmetic). They fear that the grain would get black, if they did so. The seed is taken

along in a bag or carried in a sheet on the head. A white onion is put into the joari-seed or *kakra* (cotton-seed). The *joari* or cotton will then at the harvest time become white as an onion. Also the *dhania* of red *joari* is mixed into the cotton seed, in order to get cotton white as *dhania*.

When everybody and everything is ready to begin the sowing, the driver of a *tiffan* lays his hand on the handle (*rumna*) of the *tiffan* and says: *Ganpat, swami bhai, hamare kam ke upar barkhat dijiyo*; ((Lord Ganpat, bless my work). The handle is painted with *kuku*. When the women take the first handful of seed, they say the same prayer. Then, taking the seed drill (*sarta*) in the left hand and holding the right hand full of seed over the cup of the seed-drill, they pray: "*He Ganpat swami, sut Ganesh*: O Lord Ganpat, Ganesh!" After that the sowing begins.

When the sowing is finished, they again pray to Ganpat, to bless the seed. The women at home clean the house and give it a coating of fresh cow-dung. Then they mix mud and cow-dung and mould five or seven small pots, which they fix on the wall near the door, one over the other. These pots they fill with seeds of different kind, believing that they will get as many grain barns full of grain, as they have made pots. This is called *boni utharna* (the lifting of the seed). Then a meal is prepared for the members of the family and the field labourers who have taken part in the sowing.

The sowing should be finished by the middle of July, only *tilli* may be sown later on.

### At Harvesting

One of the first crops to be harvested, is *tilli*. When the *tilli* is ripe for cutting, the reapers go to the field. Before they begin with the cutting they put a small stone on the boundary of the field. They paint it with *sendhur* and *kuku*, and offer a coconut. This stone, called *sodal*, is made to guard the crop (*anaj ki rakhawali karne-wala*). When the *tilli* stalks are cut, bound and taken to the *kala*, the *sodal* is brought along and placed in the *kala*, to watch the *tilli*, while it is drying. When the stalks are dried up, the pods open by themselves and the *tilli* falls out. Birds picking up the kernels do a lot of harm. The *sodal* is supposed to chase them away. It is also his task to watch the *tilli* against thieves. Now-a-days, however, the faith in this watchman is somewhat shaken, and the farmers prefer to let a man sleep in the *kala* during night, for protection against thieves.

After the *tilli* has been taken out and winnowed, it is piled up in the *kala*. Country-liquor is sprinkled over it. A chicken, eggs or

a coconut are offered before the *sodal* stone which is painted with *kuku* and *sendhur*. This offering is made with the intention of increasing the amount of *tilli*, when it is measured. The *tilli* is measured in *chaukis* (4 seers) before being put into a bag. The Balahis have little ability to estimate the amount of grain before measuring. If their estimate has been low and they get more *chaukis* than they expected, they rejoice, believing that their offering made the *tilli* increase. If they get less than they expected, they suspect that a neighbour has removed some of the *tilli* by magic.

Before the farmers begin with the cutting of *joari*, they set up another *sodal* stone and make an offering. Often they worship a weed in the *joari*-field called *barn* instead of a stone. It is called *joari ki mata* (*joari*-Mother).

For the threshing and winnowing of *joari* however a *sodal*-stone is indispensable. The stone is washed with water which is poured in all corners of the *kala*. Then the *deo* is painted with *sendhur* and *kuku*, a coconut is offered, also milk and rice. Incense (*gogul*) is burnt. A small pile of *joari* is heaped before the *deo* and is then given to a poor relative after the whole work has been finished.

After the *joari* is winnowed, it is not at once filled into the grain-barn. The cleaned *joari* is piled up in an oblong heap. On top of the pile are placed *joari* spikes and Mango leaves. Incense is burnt and the *joari* sprinkled with holy water. Offerings of eggs, or even of a fowl, are performed to increase by magic the amount of *joari* heaped up in the *kala*. Sometimes a magic stone is concealed among the grain. It is believed that such a stone has the power to draw the grain from other threshing floors on to the heap in which the stone is hidden. The Balahis firmly believe in the efficacy of such stones. Many a lucky farmer who by hard work and clever management has succeeded in getting a good harvest is accused of magic and witchcraft because he gathered in a richer crop than the others. This belief causes many quarrels among jealous neighbours, and sometimes life-long enmity.

To increase the harvest of cotton the Balahis perform a magic ceremony that is wide-spread over the whole world<sup>83</sup>). When the cotton pods begin to burst, the largest plant with the greatest number of boles is selected as the *Kati-Mata* (Cotton-Mother). Pieces of cotton are taken from other plants and wrapped around the branches of the selected plant. Then an offering of a coconut and of the other usual ingredients is made before the plant with the prayer that all

<sup>83</sup>) Cf. J. G. FRAZER: The Golden Bough: Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild, Vol. 1, p. 178. London 1912.

the cotton plants of the field may produce as many boles as the one before which the offering is made.

After the last gathering of cotton a few boles are thrown over the bare cotton stalks with the prayer that the field may produce cotton also the following year.

#### (4) Pilgrimages

Not far from Burhanpur, there is a hill in the Satpura range, which bears the name of Mahadeo or Shiva Maharaj. At the foot of this hill is hidden a famous shrine, dedicated to Mahadeo. It consists of only a small temple containing the image of the god. It is said that a Banjara had once to pass the night at this place on what occasion he suddenly saw the ground burst open and a huge square stone slowly emerge from the earth. It was revealed to the Banjara that this stone represented Mahadeo who wanted to be worshipped at this spot. A small shrine was erected at the place and the Banjara was made *pujari* and guardian of the shrine. It is held in high esteem by the peasants of the Nimar. A few Banjara families still live in the vicinity of the shrine, descendants of the founder of the temple. One of them acts as the *pujari* (priest) at the annual fair and he gets a share of the annual offerings in return for his service.

When a disease threatens, like cholera, small-pox, etc., the members of the different village communities assemble and vow a pilgrimage to Mahadeo's shrine. The headman of the village collects money to buy a goat and the other ingredients required for a solemn sacrifice, especially a good number of coconuts. Every villager has to give his mite. But for their maintenance during the pilgrimage the pilgrims have to provide for themselves. In forced marches, interrupted only by short rests, the men try to reach the shrine of the mighty Mahadeo as quickly as possible.

When they have arrived, they make their reverence, kill the goat and burn it with the other offerings in honour of the great god. They do not as is otherwise customary partake of the sacrificial meal after the sacrifice, but burn everything to ashes. These ashes they gather in a clean cloth and return with them to their village as quickly as possible. There they divide the ashes among the villagers as a talisman against the evil spirits of disease. Some mix a little of the precious powder into their food or drink.

In connection with this pilgrimage, sometimes a three-days' rest from work is proclaimed. During this time not even the handmills are allowed to be operated to grind the daily ration of flour. Those who have no flour in store, eat rice or other food.

If such a pilgrimage is organised by Balahis only, it affects solely the Balahi community. But if the pilgrimage is vowed by the village *patel* and the high-castes, the Balahis must contribute to the purchase of the goat and other offerings, but in the actual sacrifice they have as untouchables no part. The Balahis are not allowed to step on the platform of the shrine where the high-caste Hindus offer. Nor are they permitted to enter the shrine, but must be content to worship the god from a distance. When they take part in a pilgrimage which is organised by the high-castes, they walk a little apart from the main group, and in the preparation of the sacrifice they are called upon only for the meanest service.

There is another shrine at Mandhata on the Nerbudda, sacred to Onkarji and Mahadeo, which is equally, if not even more frequented by Nimar Balahi pilgrims than that near Burhanpur. The pilgrimage is undertaken, singly or in groups, to implore of the gods the aversion of a dreaded epidemic or the cure of a sick person; or sometimes as the fulfilment of a vow, after the cure has been completed. The pilgrims may travel at any time of the year to Mandhata, or join one of the great fairs, in March and in October (first fortnight of Kartik) lasting for 15 days. The main object of the fair is to worship at the sacred shrine of Shiva, known as Onkarji. The shrine contains one of the most sacred lingams of all India. To reach Mandhata the pilgrims either walk, or use their bullock-carts, but every means of modern transportation is permitted, the motor-bus as well as the railway. The pilgrims bathe in the sacred river and drink its water in the conviction that all their sins will be forgiven by such ablutions. Barren women are frequently brought to the temple where they sleep on the temple premises for a few nights. It is believed that the god Mahadeo will remove the curse of sterility from them during the night. Balahi women who were asked what rites were performed by the priests of the temple to take from them the curse of barrenness, refused to reveal the secret.

### Singaji Fair

Much frequented by Balahis is also the annual fair at Singaji, a village about 25 miles north-east of Khandwa, on the old Bombay—Jubbulpore road. The village is named after a saintly shepherd who lived there about 400 years ago. Singaji is the patron of cattle and is invoked during cattle diseases. When wanderers get lost in the jungle, they invoke him, and he is said to appear to them in the guise of a Bhil or Gond and show them the right way.

The fair begins on the full-moon of the month of Kuar (in October) and lasts usually for ten days. Thousands of peasants visit

the fair to pay homage to the saint and to invoke his protection for their cattle. Balahis who own a pair of bullocks are sure to go to Singaji. They seldom return with the same pair of bullocks either having exchanged their pair for another one, or having sold their bullocks and bought another pair for the money. Usually they are the losers in the bargain returning with a pair of bullocks they would never have bought on another occasion.

The fair has so much attraction for the farmers of the Nimar because a cattle exhibition takes place, and cattle races are held. The Balahis, of course, have usually no chance of exhibiting their wretched and starving bullocks, nor have they ever the courage to compete in the bullock races.

Though in modern times the fair at Singaji is more a cattle market than a place of pilgrimage, few cattle owners omit visiting the grave of the saintly cowherd and offering *gur* and *ghi* at his shrine. This offering is made either in fulfilment of a vow made during a cattle epidemic for preservation of the cattle, or with the intention to secure the protection of the deified cowherd for the future.

## Chapter XXIV

### Feasts

#### (1) Holi

On full-moon nights the Hindu villagers are always restless. The whole night through, till the silvery light of the night changes into the gold of the morning sun, the drums sound incessantly, underlining the coarse songs of the villagers with a nerve-upsetting rhythm. The various songs are always introduced by a scale of long-drawn and more or less melodious vocals, beginning at the top of the scale and gently falling down in cascading cadences. Each song ends up in a general cheering for the gods. While the higher castes of the village usually have their own entertainment, ending in a sacrifice at day-break, just when the sun rises above the horizon, the Balahis, as untouchables, keep to themselves and honour their gods according to their own rites and traditions.

On the occasion of the first spring full-moon, however, all the villagers assemble at one place, and celebrate the spring festival in concord and mutual good-will for once. Though the Balahis know the various myths which explain the origin of the Holi festival, they generally prefer the following version: They say that a woman, Holi by name, was the devoted wife of a king. When he died she committed *sati* by burning herself to death on the funeral pyre of her

royal husband. In commemoration of this *sati* performance, the Balahis celebrate their own funeral feast on the day of Holi. Because of their great poverty, the Balahis say, they are unable to spend as much money for their individual funerals as the other castes. Thus at Holi they throw mud at the rich high-caste people who buy themselves free with small gifts. These presents are put together and on a subsequent day a banquet is held in commemoration of the members of the community who have died in the previous year.

The feast of Holi begins on the night of the Chhait (March) or Phagun full-moon. The day preceding the full moon the villagers drive a pole into the ground, in the middle of the place of their religious meetings. This pole is called *danda*, the Holi pole. Meanwhile the boys gather firewood and dry cow-dung cakes which they pile up in a huge heap around the Holi pole. The fuel for the burning of the Holi fire is not collected in the jungle, but stolen from the court-yards of the village. The children are chased away good-humouredly when detected, but once their booty has been thrown on the pyre, nobody will dare to take it back. The *kotwal* (village watchman, usually a Balahi) also goes from house to house and collects dung cakes and wood for the pyre.

In the evening the village youths gather around the Holi pole. They begin to sing and to drum. Slowly the other villagers come too, some joining in the singing, but the majority contenting themselves with squatting down on their heels and listening to the songs. Also the women come and sit down close together to ward off the chilly night-air. They sit a little apart from the men, tightly wrapped up in their scarfs. The young newly married women who have come home for the feast days from their husband's village appear also happily chatting with their former friends and play-mates.

As the singers get warmed up, one man and then another one gets up and begins to dance. A boy or young man, dressed in woman's clothes and ornaments, joins as his partner. Now the lookers-on get interested and move closer. Soon the songs get an ambiguous and indecent turn, the coarse jokes of the actors exact loud applause among the men, while the women and girls chuckle blushing into their scarfs.

After a while the men begin to dance the *danda ras* (stick-dance). The dancers form a circle, two rows strong. Each man holds a short stick (*danda*) in his hand. Formerly the dancers used swords, but nowadays this dangerous weapon has been exchanged for the harmless stick. Singing in chorus, to the beating of the drums, the dancers weave intricate patterns, changing their places continually by stepping once into the outer row and then back again into the inner row of the circle. The ever-changing partners of the two lines face

each other for a moment only, and then beat their sticks together, to the rhythm of the drums. The two rows of dancers move in opposite directions, first slowly and gracefully, but soon becoming faster and wilder, as the drummers beat their drums to a faster and wilder rhythm and the singing grows louder and coarser. This dance must once have been very impressive when instead of harmless sticks the steel blades of swords flashed against one another, giving a silvery ringing sound, sparkling brightly in the moonlit night. The dancing goes on for hours, only now and then one of the dancers drops out exhausted and sits down for a short rest, while one of the audience eagerly gets up to take his place in the circle.

Shortly before day-break, when the dancing and singing reaches its culminating point, the *kotwal* goes round through the village and calls those who have been lagging behind or taking a short nap. Now the village headman (*patel*) gets up and approaches the Holi pole. He offers a coconut and a mixture of rice and curd (*dahi*) which he sprinkles on the pyre and on the red flag waving gaily from the top of the pole. After the *patel*, the *kotwal* makes his offering, according to an old privilege. He is the representative of the untouchables, usually a Balahi. For Holi is the feast of the low-caste people, supposed to be the descendants of the Rakshas. After the offering, the *kotwal* hands *tuar* stalks to the *patel* who lights them and sets the Holi fire aflame.

During the performance the drums have never ceased to roll in a passionate rhythm, and the singing has turned into wild cheerings, and indecent and obscene shouts and curses. The whole village-folk, men and women, behave with a boisterous spirit of gaiety. They take up mud and dust from the ground and throw it at each other, shouting obscene words all the while. Others hold pots or bamboo syringes filled with red or yellow fluids and sprinkle the paint all over the clothes and faces of men and women. Even women and girls forget their usual coyness and throw dust and dung using filthy language. The low-castes especially indulge in this unrestrained hilarity. They enjoy it immensely if they can get hold of a high-caste man or woman, for on this day the touch of the untouchables is not polluting. In the general turmoil it happens also that some boys disappear with their girl-friends into darkness and end the feast in each other's arms.

The moment when the Holi fire burns is considered to be auspicious for the preparing of powerful charms. Therefore some of the villagers make balls of fresh cow-dung with a hole in the middle. A string is drawn through the hole of a number of these balls and the cow-dung garland, thus formed, is thrown into the Holi fire. When the fire has burnt down, the garland is taken out.

The 'beads' are burnt to hard balls which are taken home and carefully preserved for use as a powerful medicine against scorpion stings.

On the following morning nobody goes to work. The young men and girls wander in groups through the village and throw dust and mud, rubbish and paint, at every one they meet. A small present is exacted from the victims. But at mid-day this kind of entertainment must stop, only the children are allowed to carry on all day long. This throwing of filth and dust, and the use of obscene language are, according to Hindu tradition, a commemoration of the struggle between the gods and the demons, or, in other words, between the fair-skinned Aryan invaders of India and the dark-skinned aboriginals. Psychologically it is a clever move to allow the oppressed and exploited low-castes and aboriginals a day when they may give vent for once to their bent-up feelings of inferiority against those to whom they must look up throughout the year as their superiors. And the high-caste people can afford to be generous for this one day which after all only reminds them of their lasting superiority and triumph over the former owners of the country.

For the Balahis the throwing of mud and the burning of the Holi fire have also another meaning: the performance of the funeral feast with a splendid banquet, which after a real funeral is only too often a poor and meagre affair, owing to lack of money.

When people have got tired of 'playing Holi', they proceed to the well or river and take a bath. They wash their clothes too, though the patches and splashes of red, blue, or yellow paint, cannot be removed at one washing. But the soiled clothes are worn cheerfully till they are sufficiently torn to be replaced by new ones.

After the bath, the high-caste Hindus go home, and sing and dance till the festive meal is ready. The Balahis, and other low-caste and aboriginal people form small bands of musicians, singers and dancers who go from house to house, and often also to other villages nearby, where they sing and act before the wealthy of the village. Whatever they receive as gifts in coin or kind, is put together. At the end of their begging tour which may last up to five days, a festive banquet is prepared with the things they have collected. This banquet is called: *got*. Usually the favourite dishes of an Indian country-banquet are served: rice and *dal*, with *gur* and *ghi*; or the famous *sirapuri* which consists of crumbs of *joari* or wheat bread baked in *ghi* and *gur*.

For Holi the young married women are invited home by their parents or elder brothers. A member of the family, the father or a brother, has to go and fetch the young woman since her husband usually will not send or bring her on his own account. Husbands

are generally not too anxious to give leave to their wives, well knowing how difficult it is to get them back. Among Balahis it is customary that a married daughter or sister may stay at home for five days after Holi. After the banquet on the fifth day, the husband or a brother-in law will turn up and fetch the young woman to her new home, unless her parents find an excuse to delay departure.

A boy who has been married in the previous year should not remain at his parents' house during Holi. If he is not invited by his bride's family, he is sent to other relatives. On arriving at the house of his parents-in-law, the boy is presented with a silver finger-ring. The Balahis believe that the boy would get sick if he stayed at home during Holi. The reason for this belief is not known to the Balahis, but without doubt it has something to do with his or his child-wife's reproductive faculties, since Holi is in itself mainly a festival of fertility.

### Jhenda

On the fifth day after Holi, the Balahis of some villages observe a strange feast, which is also celebrated by the aboriginal Bhils, Nahals, Gonds and Korkus. It is called *jhenda* (the Bhils in Central India call it *gar*). A tall pole, 20 or more feet high, is set up outside the village near the Balahi quarters. The bark of the tree is removed and the pole is made smooth and sleek, and slippery with soap. Sometimes the pole is painted all over in gay colours. A bag is tied to the top of the pole, containing a coconut and one-and-a-quarter rupees. The Balahi women take their stand in a circle surrounding the pole and swinging green tamarind or bamboo rods. While they walk and dance around the pole, the men stand a little apart in a compact group, carrying a kind of shield: two sticks tied cross-wise and held at the joint.

All of a sudden the men make a rush at the *jhenda* pole. One of them attempts to climb the pole while his companions shield him and themselves against the vigorous blows of the women who try to ward them off. When the climber gains the top of the pole, he takes his price, glides down and goes off as quickly as possible, while heavy blows are showered upon his back. The women do not spare the men, and many a man feels the pains of his sore and swollen back for days after. Some women have taken a glass of country liquor or a pinch of *bhang* (hemp) before the performance, to bolster up their courage. They are half-drunk and so excited by the noise and the fighting that at last they attack the whole crowd of village people who stand around shouting and laughing and enjoying the whole thing immensely. If the women can get hold of

the *patel* and the *kotwal*, they beat them until these men buy themselves free by a small present.

This entertainment may be repeated the next day, as long as a prize is offered to the climbers. These prizes are presented by the *patel* and other wealthy people of the village. Usually from five to seven men climb the *jhenda* pole in a day. Sometimes even a high-caste man undertakes to climb the pole for penance, in the belief that all his sins will be forgiven if he reaches the top of the pole.

The song of the women under the *jhenda* pole goes as follows:

*Holi jalgai, Phag ayo, rasya!*

(Holi has been burnt, Phag has come, boys!)

*Krishna bhi khele, Kaneya bhi khele;*

(Krishna is playing now, Kaneya;)

*Khele Brij ke log.*

(Playing are the people of Brij.)

*Hori jalgai!*

(Holi has been burned!)

*Rama bhi khele, Lachhmanu bhi khele*

(Rama too is playing, and Lakshman)

*Sita nar.*

(Sita's husband.)

*Hori jalgai!*

(Holi has been burnt!)

*Shankar khele, Gaura bhi khele,*

(Shankar is playing, Gaura too.)

*Nar da muni ji ke sath, rasya!*

(With her companion, boys!)

*Hori jalgai!*

(Hori has been burnt!)

The meaning of the *jhenda* performance is not known to the Balahis. They have adopted this custom from the Bhils or from the Rajputs of Central India who still perform the *jhenda* on a big scale. It is said to be a commemoration of the tournament by which Arjun won Draupadi as his wife by shooting down a golden fish from the top of a tall pole. Among the Bhils of the Jessawada Taluka, Bombay Presidency, the climber who gains the top of the *jhenda* pole, has until this day the right to choose among the girls one as his wife and to take her at once to his house<sup>64</sup>).

<sup>64</sup>) D. N. MAJUMDAR. The Bhils of Gujrat, in: Gujarat Research Society Journal, 1942, vol. IV. No. 4, p. 230.

(b) The Ganagaur Festival<sup>85)</sup>

The feast begins during the first half of the month of Chhait (in March or April), ten days after Holi. Gauri, who is Parvati, is the mother of Ganpat-Ganesh and the goddess of fertility. Whoever wants to be blessed with child takes part in the celebration of this feast. Every young Balahi couple must at least once perform the rites by which the goddess is worshipped, else, so the Balahis believe, their marriage will remain without issue.

The legend relates that a queen, Kajerlani by name, was the first to celebrate the feast in its present form. Gauri-Parvati was well pleased with this new form of worship and rewarded the queen with the gift of a child, the future king. In memory of this first celebration the Hindus of the Nimar perform yearly the elaborate ceremonies which mark this feast as one of the most important in the calendar.

The high-caste Hindus do not allow the low-castes and untouchables, Balahis, Chamars, Nahals for instance, to perform all the ceremonies and reserve at least the sowing of the *jowara* (as they call the wheat seedlings) for themselves. The low-caste Hindus yield to this restriction by pretending that they are afraid of taking on themselves the responsibility for the sowing and nursing of the tender wheat seedlings. For it is believed that any mishap to the *jag* (planting of wheat) or any mistake in the performance of the ritual is severely avenged by the great goddess. Blindness or even death, but certainly a great misfortune will befall the culprit.

Whatever the origin of the Ganagaur festival may be, so much is certain that at present all castes and tribes of the Nimar, high and low, Hindus and aboriginals, hold this feast in equally high esteem. The beauty and symbolic significance of the ceremonies, the colourful processions, the expenses and the fasts which the persons who celebrate it must undergo, make a deep impression upon all. The purpose of the feast, fertility, is also very appealing.

All persons who intend to celebrate the Ganagaur feast assemble in groups at the Holi pole, sometimes accompanied by a band of musicians. On the spot where they all burn the Holi yearly, they make the solemn vow to perform all the ceremonies which are required for the Ganagaur feast.

After that the high-caste Hindus ask their *barwa* to sow the wheat for them and to guard the seedlings. The Balahis approach a Brahman, or a Lohar (iron-smith) or Sutar (carpenter), and request

<sup>85)</sup> *Ganagaur* is derived from *gana* (Skt) — multitude and *Gauri* — Parvati. Many images of Gauri are carried in procession to the river for immersion, hence the name.

him to sow the wheat for them. Each man gives him a *kangan* (pound) of wheat, supplies him with a flat basket filled with black soil, wherein he has to sow the wheat, and pays him five annas as his fee.

Before the Brahman (or otherwise the *barua*) goes to sow the wheat, he takes a bath of purification and washes his clothes. Next he levels a safe place behind his house, well protected against all intruders, human or animal, and gives it a coating with fresh cow-dung. Then he places there all his clients' flat baskets, filled with black soil. The men or women who have requested him to sow the wheat for them must fast for five consecutive days, that is, they may not take food prepared on the hearth-fire until the sun has set. But fruits, and fluids like milk etc. may be taken any time of the day.

Now the *purohit* (priest) pours water on the soil contained in the baskets and sows the wheat. For the next nine days he must daily water the baskets and carefully guard them against straying animals or harmful insects. On no account is he allowed to leave his house for any considerable time, and he may not ask any other man to guard the baskets during his absence.

The next day he begins to build the images of Gauri, of Raja Dhanya, her husband, and often also of Ganpati, her son. He forms a skeleton of bamboo sticks, tying the sticks together with strings and filling the spaces with rags. Then he dresses the figure of Gauri in the attire of a goddess, while Dhanya Raja is dressed up as a god. The figures are about two feet high, sometimes smaller, but often even bigger. Nowadays these images (*murti*) are often bought ready-made in the bazaar at Khandwa where skilled artisans are able to produce quite handsome figures. They can be used again and again; after the festival they are put into a box and stored away in a safe corner of the house.

It is the pride of each family to dress up their figures as well as possible. The dresses of Gauri, her husband and son, are of the best material, silk or fine cotton fabric, and the women deck them out with their own jewels. Gauri, the *mata*, is also garlanded with a wreath of spices, such as *laung*, *ilaichi*, *doda*, *kharik*, and *kopra*.

The figures of Gauri and her companions are placed on a platform near the baskets containing the seedlings. Over them the *purohit* builds a roof to ward off the burning rays of the sun. Every evening the men and women for whom the seedlings have been planted assemble at the house of their *purohit*. He brings a brass-plate (*arti*) with *kapur*, a *dhela*, *kuku* and incense sticks. Then he paints the foreheads of his clients with *kuku* which he then applies also to the images of Gauri and her companions. Then he lights the *kapur* and the incense sticks and moves the plate slowly in a circle over

the platform with the seedlings. This ceremony is called *fyot dena* (to give light). It is repeated on each of the following evenings. During these days the men and women who have taken the vow to celebrate this feast do not only fast, but are obliged also to abstain from heavy work. Only the most urgent household duties are attended to. Every evening the other women of the village gather at the houses where the feast is celebrated and sing hymns in honour of the *mata*. After the singing they get some *dhani* (*bata*, *tamaul*, roasted *joari* grain) from the house.

On the seventh day after the sowing of the wheat, in the afternoon, five married couples are invited by each celebrating family. Only such couples may be invited whose husband as well as wife have been married for the first time and are blameless, i. e. have never committed a 'sin' which is punished with expulsion from the caste (as for instance the killing of a dog or cat). After having taken a bath, they come in festive attire, at noon fasting since morning. Couple after couple arrive and are invited into the house. The men squat down in a row at one side of the room, the women at the other. Now the host (head of the celebrating family) draws a *chauk* on the floor in the centre of the room with wheat flour. He then fetches a *lota* full of water into which he drops a *takli* (silver neck-ring) and a silver neck-chain.

After a while all rise, and a woman takes the *lota* on her head and all go in procession to the outskirts of the village where they stop under a Mango tree. The *lota* is placed under the tree. A man climbs up and plucks some leaves and fruits which, at that time of the year, are still very small. These are put into the *lota*. The women now begin to dance around the tree, singing and clapping their hands to the rhythm of the melody. Then a man rubs *kuku* on the tree and on the *lota* with his thumb, and ties a red thread around its neck. Now all worship the *lota*, for they believe that the spirit of the great *mata* has taken possession of it.

After that the woman again places the *lota* on her head and the procession moves homewards. The men walk a little apart from the women. Both groups sing hymns in honour of the *mata*. When they arrive at the house, they enter, and the woman places the *lota* (also called *kalas*) on the *chauk*. It is believed that now the *mata* has come to visit their house and will stay with them for a few days. As long as the *lota* remains in the house, one of the men must guard it against any stray animals which might desecrate it.

Soon after their return from the procession to the Mango tree, the worshippers proceed to the house of their *purohit*. They inform him that they have come to worship the *mata* (*Mata ki darshan*

*karne ke liye aye*). The *purohit* carries the image of the *mata* to the front of his house where the worshippers are waiting. They give him a gift from 4 annas to one rupee four annas, and a coconut, which the *purohit* breaks for the offering. Then all worship the *mata*. After that they return to the celebrating house, singing a hymn in honour of the *mata*.

After having entered the house, they sit down around the *lota*, the men at one side, the women at the other. When they have washed their hands they proceed to sing. A man brings chips of Mango and Amari-wood and some flax-stalks, cut into small pieces. He makes a pile before the *lota*, puts some red threads on top of it, pours *ghi* over the whole and lights a fire. Then they put a necklace (*har*) of spices, *kharik*, *kopra*, *laung*, *ilaichi*, on the *lota*. Also pieces of cloth and silver ornaments of a woman, also *tikli* (paper-star for the forehead), a *kauri* necklace, a *pot* (pearl ornament), in short all those ornaments which a woman may wear. It is all for the *mata* who has taken her abode in the *lota*.

Now each of the married couples gets a coconut. Two and two they approach the *mata*, lay down the coconut before the *lota*, paint it with *kuku* and pray: "*He mata sri; maine tumari man dediya, ab mere ghar par ashish dijo* — (O holy mother, I am fulfilling my vow, therefore bless my house)". First the man says his prayer, then his wife. Each pair put down their coconut, the fifth coconut is put on top of the others. It is called *gaur*. They offer rice, *gur*, *ghi*, *kuku*, and four annas. Then the worshippers paint each other's forehead with *kuku*, a man painting the men, a woman applying the sacred powder on the women's forehead. Often they pour a mixture of oil and *kuku* on each others' hair. Then men and women sit down at their former places and wash their hands.

Meanwhile a meal has been prepared for all who have taken part in the ceremonies. They have been fasting the whole day. The usual rice, *dal*, *gur* and *ghi* are served, as additional dishes to the remainder of the offerings: rice, coconut and spices. The five married couples are served first, after them the other members of the celebrating family receive their share of the meal.

It is already late in the afternoon, when they finish their meal. Now all get up. A woman takes the *lota* and carries it on to the *angan*, the platform before the house. It is set on a *chauk*. The women walk around the *lota*, singing a hymn. Then it is brought back to the main room of the house. The *lota* is guarded the whole night, in order that no living being may touch it. This day is called *bat ka fora*: distribution of *bat*, because much *dhani* is eaten by the singers.

The next day, the eighth day after the sowing of *jag* (*jowara*), the same ceremonies are repeated. Four to ten couples are entertained according to the wealth of the celebrating family.

In the evening, after the meal, the women take up the *lota*, but they do not put it down on the *angan* of their house, but proceed singing in procession to the house of the *patel* or another village notable. Other groups of singing women, from the different quarters, join them. At the *patel's* house, some sheets are spread on the ground. Each group puts down its *lota* on a different sheet. The *lotas* of the untouchable castes must be set specially apart, for fear of pollution. Each group of women walks round their *lota*, singing. This performance lasts about an hour. Then the *lotas* are again placed on the head and carried in procession to the river or to a well; each group proceeding to their own well or bathing place. Also the figures (*murtis*) of the *mata* and the gods are taken along. This is called: *mata pahunchana* (to bring the *mata* home). The *lotas* and images of the *mata* and her attendants are put down on the ground. Water is drawn from the well or river and a few drops poured into the mouth of the *murtis*. Then they offer *kapur* which they burn, and worship. A dance by walking round the *murtis* brings the performance to an end. The *lotas* and images are then carried home in procession.

Sometimes a wealthy villager invites all the *matas* to his house. In this case the processions proceed to his house which has been cleaned and smeared with fresh cow-dung. Sheets are often spread on the path in front of the walking women. At the door of his house, the host stands waiting with his wife. His *dhoti* is knotted to the corner of her *sari*. His *pagri* is loosely twisted around his head and neck, and he holds its ends between folded hands. His wife carries a *arti* (plate) with offerings. The women enter the house and put the *lotas* and images down in the main room. They remain there the whole night and sometimes another day and night. Nobody goes to sleep. The members of the family and the guests dance and sing throughout the whole night. It goes without saying that the *matas* of the untouchable castes are not invited to the house of a caste-Hindu. They keep apart. The host worships each single *mata*, offering *kuku* and coconuts. After him also the guests pay their homage. Sometimes nearly the whole village is invited, fed and entertained.

On the 9th day, which is called: *Jowara*, the different caste groups proceed in procession to the river or to a well, which is not used for drinking purposes. The women carry the *lotas* and *murtis*, the *purohit* comes and hands over the *jags* (*jowara*) to the groups for which they have been sown. He touches with the baskets the right, then the left cheek of the women who have to carry them to

the river. This is the usual form of greeting. Some Balahis say that the *purohit* often refuses to hand over the *jag* baskets of the Balahis to Balahi women but carries them himself to the river. The wheat seedlings would be polluted by the touch of a Balahi woman! But it seems that not all *purohits* are so rigorous. On their arrival at the river side, the *lotas*, the *murtis* and the *jowara* baskets are placed on the ground, each caste having its own *lotas*, images and baskets of wheat seedlings. Then the persons for whom the wheat has been sown take their baskets and expose them to the water of the river. The heavy baskets soon sink to the bottom of the river. The *lotas* are emptied into the river, and also the Mango leaves and garlands of spices are thrown into the water. The valuable silver ornaments and the clothes are of course removed from the *murtis* and taken home. The *murtis* themselves are carried home in procession, the women singing hymns in honour of Ganagaur. This last day is called the day of leave-taking. And the last ceremony when the baskets are put into the river is called *mata pahuncha dena* or *jag thanda karna*, which means: to bring the mother home, resp. to cool the wheat. The meaning is that the *mata* is brought to the river, after staying nine days in the houses of men and from there Raja Dhanya may fetch his wife!

On returning home the images of the *mata*, of her husband and son, are wrapped in sheets of cloth and put away in a box for further use in the coming year

### (3) Dorbarai

It is perhaps hard for an outsider to imagine with what tense anxiety and impatience the Balahis are on the look-out for the coming of the monsoon. In the hot days before the first rain when all nature lies panting under the blazing rays of a merciless sun, and the soil burns the soles of his bare feet, the Balahi farmer has prepared his field for sowing. He has long since figured out what to sow and how much, and has bought his seed grain or borrowed it from the land-lord or Bania (who will take it back with an interest of from fifty to a hundred per cent after six months). The agricultural tools have also been put in working order as there will be no time to get them ready once the sowing has started. The bullocks now enjoy a time of rest, to recover their strength in preparation for the hard work during the sowing season. Impatiently everybody watches the oncoming dark clouds heavily laden with rain. The air is sultry and depressing.

But the Balahi cannot content himself with passively waiting till the rains start. He tries to hasten their advent by various magical devices. He even goes so far as to insult his gods, in particular

Hanuman, the village guardian, when the monsoon is delayed. In such a case the Balahis assemble before the image of Hanuman and, under curses and deprecations, they throw filth and mud on the image of the god. It is believed that Hanuman feels ashamed of such treatment and wants to get rid of his evil-smelling coating. He soon sends rain which washes off the filth from his image.

Another 'rain invoking rite' which is called Dorbarai is performed in the villages of the Nimar. It proceeds in the following way: On the new-moon day of the sacred month of Jaisht (in May or June) the village boys get up early in the morning. They proceed to the jungle where they cut branches and leaves of the Palas tree (*Butea frondosa*). One boy is wrapped from head to foot in a coat of large Palas leaves so that not a spot of his body is visible under the big green leaves. A rope is tied around his waist and with rough pulling and much yelling the boy is dragged through the streets of the village. Other boys pour water over his head till he is drenched to the skin. The entire village youth gather around the boy, tease him and shout: *Gana* (Much!) when the pails are emptied over the boy clad in Palas leaves. He is called *dedar* (frog) and is supposed to represent a frog, the herald and companion of the rains. The whole ceremony is a kind of homoeopathic magic, to call the rains by drenching a human image of a frog, the so-called companion of the monsoon. It is an inversion of cause and effect, the effect being anticipated to produce its cause. This inversion is a common phenomenon in magical practices.

The boy who tugs the human frog through the village, not missing a single house, sings in front of every door:

"We tease the frog that you may  
Open your grain-barn.  
It is covered with a sheet.  
May your son be strong!  
The barn is full of grain.  
May your son be rich!  
In your stable are many cattle.  
May your son love you!"

Some times the mischievous boys add for fun the following verse:

"On your grain-barn are mangoes.  
May your sons die!"

One of the inmates of the house throws mud or rubbish at the human frog or pours a pail of dirty water over his head. But afterwards the boys receive small gifts of grain, *gur*, or mangoes from every family. These presents are made cheerfully, because every-

body wants to receive the blessing of the rain-god for the coming monsoon.

Meanwhile the boys around the human frog sing another song interrupting it at times with loud cheers when a villager has been especially generous with his gifts. The angry wailing of the poor 'frog' can likewise be heard when the water douches and the jostling overreach his patience and endurance. The boys sing the following song, one boy taking the lead, the others repeating each verse or singing the refrain:

"Fill the small box with sandalwood paste,  
 Nine hundred horses fill the fold.  
 One horse is of green colour,  
 My soul is sitting on it.  
 I shall accomplish it, oh, I shall accomplish it!  
 From Delhi I shall call him.  
 From Delhi came a great king.  
 In this palace are many hundred bows.  
 One bow we wanted from him,  
 And the best cow of the Almighty God.  
 Whose daily food is a hundred bundles of grass.  
 In one bundle we have found a *kauri* shell.  
 We gave the *kauri* to a Bania,  
 The Bania gave us salt,  
 We gave the salt to the cow.  
 The cow gave us milk.  
 Of the milk we made *khir*<sup>66</sup>)  
 What was good, we ate ourselves,  
 What was bad we gave to the peacock.  
 The peacock gave us a feather.  
 The feather we gave to a Raja,  
 The Raja gave us a horse.  
 The horse we made jump over the fence,  
 The fence gave us wood.  
 The wood we put on a hearth,  
 The hearth gave us a meal.  
 The meal we gave to the village *panch*,  
 The *panch* gave us a wife.  
 In the crowded bazaar we got a fine house!"

After every house in the village has been visited, the 'human frog' is dragged to the shrine of Hanuman. There he is undressed and the leaves are thrown down before the image of the god. Then

<sup>66</sup>) a dish consisting of rice, sugar, milk, etc.

all the boys return home and prepare a dainty meal from the presents obtained during their performance. Having eaten their fill they again go to the shrine of Hanuman where they offer some morsels of their meal. Also the boy who played the part of the frog worships Hanuman, but then runs away as fast as he can, for the boys throw burning dung-cakes at him amid abuses and filthy words.

Next the boys play what is called *aonlai-piprai*. All the boys except two climb a big leafy tree, a *pipal* or *aonla* (hence the name of the game!). One of the two boys who remain on the ground takes a stick (about three feet long) and throws it as far as he can. Then he runs to a tree and climbs it quickly, while the other boy runs after the stick. As soon as he gets it, he returns to the tree and, leaning the stick against it, climbs up and begins to chase the other boys. The boy whom he catches must give him a small present; but no boy can be caught who is able to touch the stick leaning against the tree.

This game is repeated two or three times till all get tired of playing and decide to call it off.

At the same time the girls too are busy: From clay they form the image of a frog which they then put on a tile taken from the roof of a house. One girl places the tile with the frog on her head and then all the girls wander through the village from house to house.

Some girls pour water over the girl who carries the image of the frog, while the others sing:

"Give water, o frog-mother!  
Still more rain let fall in showers!  
The paddy is getting dry on the field,  
The *kodon* is getting dry.  
Send rain in plenty  
That the waters flow in the field ridges.  
On the black field grows a *pipal* tree.  
Give, mother, a handful of grain!"

At each house the girls receive a handful of grain or sweets. After that they proceed to the shrine of Hanuman and worship his image, offering a small part of their earnings. The clay image of the frog, hardly recognisable as such after so many douches, is left at the shrine of the monkey god. The girls then go home and prepare a meal from the gifts collected on their tour: this they eat together.

After their dinner the girls too play *aonlai-piprai* like the boys.

This Dorbarai rite has a close resemblance to a ceremony that is performed at Slankamen, on the Danube, near Belgrad in Yugoslavia:

"A crowd of children carrying green branches were tripping along laughing and singing, accompanying one of their number, who, stripped of her clothing, was almost hidden from sight in a screen of green twigs and leaves. At every courtyard door, they stopped and sang a song, and the lady of the house came out with a bucket of water which she poured vigorously over the half-naked figure. It was a *Dodola*, a charm against the draught, for there has been little rain this year and the peasants fear for their crops. We too begged water and poured it over the dripping *dodola*." (L. F. Edwards: *Danube Stream*. London 1941, 2nd edition, p. 255).

#### (4) Akadhij

The commencement of the agricultural year falls on Akadhij, the third day of *Baisakh Sudi* (April—May).

Only the Balahi who owns a field, celebrates this feast. He goes the day before the feast to the *kumar* and buys two red earthen pots. The bigger one may hold about five *seers* (litres), the smaller one is about half this size. In the afternoon the house is swept and receives a coating of fresh cow-dung. The inmates of the house take a bath and wash their clothes.

In the evening or the next morning a *chauk* is drawn, with *joari* flour, on the floor near the middle pillar of the main room. Four clods, as big as a fist, are formed of black clay and placed on the four corners of the *chauk*. The two waterpots (*gara matke*) are filled to the brim with water and placed on the *chauk*, one upon the other. They are supported by the four mud-clods. On top of the *matkas* the head of the family puts a *lota*, and the new bullock ropes. These ropes are of *amari* fibres (*mohrit ka ras*), not of hemp. They are quite new and are preserved for the sowing. On and around the ropes the man puts Mango leaves. The Mango tree is sacred and its leaves shall convey their own blessing power on the ropes so that no harm may befall the working bullocks nor the future crop.

In front of the earthen pots the Balahi puts a few chips of Mango and Sandal-wood and cotton-wool (*rut*). Then he pours *ghi* over the pile and burns it as an offering to the god of the rains. A handful of boiled *dal*, rice, *gur*, *ghi*, sugar and bread crumbs are mixed and formed into several small balls. For every deceased member of the family a ball is thrown into the fire. Often the Balahis

also pour liquor, tobacco, hemp or opium into the flames. It is believed that these offerings will benefit the deceased.

In the evening of the feast-day a festive meal is prepared for all members of the family and other near relatives who happen to be present or who don't perform this offering in their own house.

For the next few days the four mud clods under the earthen vessels are closely observed. Each clod has been named after one of the four months of the rainy season: Ashad, Sravan, Bhado, and Kuar. The porous pots leak and the water drops down on the outside on the four supporting clods. With great interest the Balahis watch which of the clods draws the most water and is first dissolved. They believe that the month that is signified by the melting clod will bring much rain. Guided by these signs the Balahi farmer selects the seed for his fields. If much rain has to be expected, he will sow rice or cotton which need much moisture. If less rain is likely to fall, he will sow *tilli*, *joari*, or *urad* on the same field. The seed varies also according to the kind of soil in a field: in the year of a heavy monsoon only rice or cotton can be sown in black soil, while *joari* or *urad* would rot in the moist soil. In a year when only slight showers are expected the kind of seed must be carefully chosen, especially for the quickly drying red soil. Naturally the farmers are very interested to know beforehand how much rain will fall in the coming monsoon. The farmers keenly feel the need for exact weather-forecasts, but ignorant of scientific meteorology, they try to lift the veil from the uncertain future by magic and divination.

No Balahi will lose his faith in such practices if different results are obtained in other houses where the same performance is made. Every Balahi is concerned only for his own house and field and conveniently thinks that other people may have different needs, or that the other Balahis must have made a mistake, or that an evil spirit must have deceived them. And if he finds after the monsoon that his own forecast was wrong, he accepts it with resignation in the belief that something must have gone wrong in performing the ceremony. And he is determined to be more careful the next time. But his belief in the Akhadij ceremony is not in the least shaken.

Some Balahis whom I asked for an explanation of the frequent failure of this magical weather-forecast, gave the following reply: "Nowadays not even the gods can be trusted. Times are bad now and people have become very wicked; so many lead a sinful life and care nothing about the gods. No wonder, that the gods take revenge and deceive us when we ask them to tell us the future!"

## Chapter XXV

## Other Feasts

(1) *Rakhi*

Before Rama went into exile, he, as a good son, took affectionate leave of his old mother Kausalya. With many tears the mother fastened a bracelet around his wrist, as a token of her love and affection.

In remembrance of this touching leave-taking, the Hindus celebrate Rakhi on Srawan Sudi (in August). For this feast the Balahis invite also their sisters and daughters who with great pleasure return to their parents' house to celebrate the feast with their nearest relatives. Custom demands that a husband allows his wife to go home for this feast when her father or brother arrives to fetch her.

In the evening the mother of the family ties a thread to the door-post (*thausri*) of the house, paints it with *kuku* and worships it. This door-post is considered as the god of the house: *ghar ka malak!* Then another thread is tied to the weaving loom if there is any. For the Balahis hold the implements of their traditional profession in high esteem and regard them as something more than mere lifeless things. After having shown her respect to the weaving loom the Balahi mother ties another thread around the wrist of her male relatives, except her own husband and father-in-law. Only her father, her brothers, uncles and cousins may receive the string from her, for this bond excludes any sexual relationship. The woman receives a small present from each man who, also, touches her feet with folded hands. In the evening a festive meal is prepared which unites all the members of the family and other near relatives who happen to be present.

The thread which is tied around the wrist of the left hand is often a simple red string, but sometimes a cord of silk with tinsels, fastened with a loop and button, and hung with seven little flossy silk tassels of the seven colours of the spectrum. It is bought in the bazaar.

By this ceremony the man who receives the Rakhi bracelet becomes a brother (*dharm bhai*) or father (*dharm bap*) of the woman who ties it around his wrist. Also a good friend of the family, or a friendly neighbour, may receive it, even if he is of another caste. The Rakhi relationship strictly excludes sexual relations between the partners. Girls therefore take good care not to give the Rakhi string to a man whom they love or hope to marry. If sexual relations between Rakhi relatives are detected the culprits are punished as if they had committed incest.

(2) *Nag Panchmi*

The Snake-feast is held on the fifth day of the light half (*sudi*) of the lunar month of Srawan (July or August).

On this day nothing should be cooked on the hearth-fire (*chulha*) which is sacred to the snakes for they are frequently found near it for the purpose of warming themselves. On this day *masur ki dal* may not be cooked, because *masur* grains are like the snake's eyes. Rice should not be boiled, because rice is like the snake's teeth. The usual frying-pan (*tawa*) for baking the *joari*-bread should not be used, because the *tawa* is like the snake's body in colour.

Therefore the Balahis eat wheat-bread on this day and *tuar ki dal*. They use plates and pots of brass or tin, but no earthen pots. Milk too they will not drink, because milk is reserved for the snake on Nag Panchmi. No Balahi, not even the poorest man, goes to work on this day. It is even forbidden to go to the fields or into the jungle. Everybody should remain at home, celebrating the festival in his own house. It is the feast of the hearth-fire.

The head of the family takes no food till noon. Only then may he eat something, while the other members of the family can take their repast beforehand. After his meal the man collects pieces of coal from the hearth-fire and grinds them to powder, which he heaps in a small pile on the up-turned bottom side of a plate or cooking pot. Then he paints the outside wall near the door-post with lime or white clay about 3 feet square.

He now draws a *chauk* on the white square with coal powder; in the *chauk* a cobra, an *awla* snake, a scorpion, a man's face or figure, and a comb. The man's figure represents Nanga Baba, the snake god, in the form of a snake-charmer, as they are often seen wandering through the village showing their skill with dancing snakes and catching the snakes in the villages, or at least pretending to do so. The comb is painted as a necessary requisite of Nanga Baba, who as a true snake-charmer wears his hair uncut. The cobra and *awla* are painted on the wall as the two most poisonous snakes which endanger the life of a Balahi.

Next the man takes *sendhur* and paints the eyes and the tongues of the snakes red, and makes marks on their necks and bodies. Then he worships Nanga Baba by offering a coconut, *joari ka dhani* (the white, pulped and roasted grains of *joari*, a favourite dainty), together with *gur*, *ghi* and *kuku*, while he prays that Nanga Baba may save his family from death by snake-bite. Meanwhile the women form small snakes of cotton wool. The man smears a mixture of *dhani*, *gur* and *ghi* on the mouth of these snakes, which are placed on the ground just below the *chauk* on the wall. Then a fire is lighted,

*gur* and *ghi* are poured into the flames as an offering. A *sirpal* fruit is broken and a piece of the fruit put in the mouth of the snake. The rest of the fruit is given to the children. Also the *dhani* and *gur* is distributed among them. If a snake temple is near, or a snake-hole is detected, milk is placed there in a small earthen pot.

After the sacrifice all sit down and partake of a festive meal. Then a hammock is hung up on the veranda and children and grown-ups are rocked with laughter and jollity, in the name of Nanga Baba. It is believed, that the god is as pleased with the swinging, as if he himself were being rocked in the hammock.

The Balahis, like all Hindus, believe that the world rests on the head of a huge snake; when the snake moves, the earth shakes in an earthquake. The high-caste Hindus consider the snake as sacred and usually do not kill it. But not so the Balahis who kill not only snakes, but also scorpions wherever they can get hold of them. They even believe that a person cannot recover from snake-bite, unless the snake is killed.

On Nag Panchmi the snake is worshipped by Balahis both because the Hindus do so, and out of fear. By painting its picture on the wall they intend to protect themselves from snake-bites and scorpion-stings for a year, till to the next feast.

The evening of Nag Panchmi is devoted to wrestling contests (*kushti*).

### (3) *Jiroti*

The Balahis have no clear idea about the meaning of this feast nor do they connect it with any Hindu myth. Jiroti is celebrated as the feast of the ancestors by the aboriginal Gonds and Korkus of the district. From them the Balahis must have adopted it without, however, grasping its deeper significance. For them it is just a family feast to which even the married daughters of a family are invited.

Jiroti is celebrated on Amaus Srawan (the new-moon day of July-August). As far as possible all the married daughters of the family arrive at their parents' house to celebrate this feast in the circle of their own family. On the morning of the feast day, all go to the well or to a *nala* and take a bath. They also wash their clothing. After their return from the bath a member of the family draws certain figures upon the wall of the house around and above the main entrance. The figures represent: a man, an elephant, a horse, a camel, and a tiger. Any member of the household may do the drawing but usually those who are most skilled in this art display their talents. But still, it often requires strong imagination to recognise the significance of the drawings.

Meanwhile the women of the house prepare a festive meal to which all relatives are invited except the woman who grinds the flour for the wheat cakes which are eaten on this occasion. She must fast until evening. She is permitted to eat only fruits till her task is accomplished and sufficient flour is prepared.

Since the Balahis do not connect this feast with any deity they do not perform any sacrifice on this day.

#### (4) *Ram Satra*

In the month of Srawan (July) the Hindus celebrate the feast of Ram Satra or Dolgyaras. The celebration begins on the ninth day of the month and lasts for nine days. The *phaire*, temple singers and dancers, worship the god of the temple by dancing and singing continually without any interruption for the whole of this time. Every group attends the temple for four hours, after which the first group is replaced by another. On *punam*, the day of full-moon, a throne with a canopy is built and gorgeously decorated. Also the image of Rama, Lakshman or any other god, is fashioned and set on the *gaddi* (throne). Other *deos* also take their places under the canopy. In the late afternoon a procession is started. The temple servants and devotees dance and sing and shout the praise of the *deos* on the throne, which they carry through the village. After that the whole procession returns to the temple and the *deos* are brought back to their usual places. After that a new procession is formed in which only men take part. They walk in a wide circle around the village. This procession is called *chauras*. One man carries a brass plate (*khakra arti*), on which a small *deo* and a burning *ghi* lamp are placed.

The Balahis take no active part in this worship. They have to be content with the role of lookers-on. But they come in crowds to Khandwa, where the feast is celebrated with special solemnity. They offer a small coin, if they are allowed to approach close enough to the temple.

#### (5) *Pola*

Pola, the feast of the bullocks, is celebrated on the 15th day of Bhado (August or September), on new moon.

The explanatory legend to account for the festival is that the bullocks complained to Mahadeo that men were oppressing them beyond endurance. Mahadeo appointed a day to enquire into the matter. Men got to know of this and treated the bullocks so well that day that when Mahadeo came he found their complaint utterly groundless. The bullocks were outwitted but they still claim their day.

In the morning the *kotwal*, who is commonly a Balahi, goes from house to house and collects hemp (*san*) of which he makes a strong rope. Nobody goes to work on this day. The owners of bullocks instead make their preparations for the feast in the evening. After noon they drive their bullocks to a river or pond where they bathe them. Cows and buffaloes are left at home, they will be feasted on Diwali. After the bath the horns of the bullocks are painted a bright red or blue and sometimes a hole is pierced through the top of the horns and tassels or bells fastened to the horns. Or silver or gold paper is wrapped round the horns. Also the bodies of the bullocks are sprinkled with red or blue paint, and their foreheads adorned with flower garlands or many-coloured strings.

Towards evening the *patel* asks the *kotwal* to call all the villagers who have bullocks. All lead their animals to a place outside the village, the bullocks of the *patel* usually leading in colourful decorations. The *kotwal* now fetches the rope which he prepared in the morning. At a distance of about ten yards he fixes two poles in the ground and ties the rope between them. The poles are called *rassi ka doran*. The *patel* comes, paints each pole with kuku and offers a coconut, *dahi* (curd) and a few grains of rice.

Then he gives the sign for the beginning of the race. The villagers drive their bullocks in pairs towards the rope. Some bullocks shy and shrink back, some pairs jump over the rope, leaving their driver far behind, other pairs run against it and take rope and posts with them in the race. This is a most welcome sign and shows the strength of the pair of bullocks in question. It is also a sign how the future crop will turn out. If a pair of white bullocks breaks the rope or the posts, the peasants believe, that *joari* will grow well in the coming monsoon; if black bullocks are victorious, the *urad* will be good; if however speckled bullocks, the *tilli* will bring a topping harvest.

After the race the bullocks are driven to the shrine of Hanuman, or Bhaisasur, the god of cattle. They are made to touch the god's image with their legs and then walk five times round it. After that the *patel* and other villagers each offer a coconut, rice, *haldi*, and *kuku* to the tutelary god of the village. Then all return home. At home each peasant worships his bullocks. Throughout the year the bullocks work hard for their owners, but today they are treated as gods. They get the meal of the peasants: *joari*-bread, rice and *dal*. A bed (*khat*, *palang*) is placed before them, a sheet spread over it and the food for the bullocks served on this improvised table. As desert they often get half a pound of *joari* grain.

The children make models of bullocks, formed of the pith of a certain kind of wood, and play with them dragging them about.

In the evening the peasants take a specially good dinner. However, only those Balahis take part in the celebration who have bullocks of their own.

### (6) *Janmashtami*

This feast is celebrated on the 8th day of dark half of the month of Bhado, the day of Krishna's birth.

It is principally the feast of the Balahi *sadhus* (also called *gurus*) and their disciples, the so-called *chela*. The men who intend to take active part in the celebration, have to fast the previous day. Fasting means for a Balahi: not to eat any food which is prepared on the hearth-fire. He is allowed, therefore, to eat fruit and raw vegetables or to drink water, milk and fruit-juice. All the houses are cleaned and smeared with cattle dung. The men and women take a bath and wash their clothes.

At a spacious place in the village, where the people usually assemble for their meetings and for entertainment, a strong post is rammed into the ground. On top of it they fix an iron axle and on the axle a cart-wheel. From the spikes of the wheel they hang a number of gaily coloured tapes. Over the cart wheel they spread a cloth and adorn the whole arrangement with draperies, leaves and paper-garlands.

On the evening of this day all the villagers assemble around this pole (*komba*). The men who have a small brass image of a *deo* or *mata* in the house, bring it and put it on a sheet before the *komba*. The Balahi *sadhu* (*guru*) bathes the images in milk or water, which his disciples and followers afterwards drink. It is called *charan amrit* and is believed to convey immortal life (ambrosia).

After this the village youths begin to sing and to dance round the dancing pole. The dancers, led by a man or boy drumming on a *dholki*, grasp one of the tapes hanging from the spikes and walk in dancing rhythm round the pole.

The leader of the chorus, usually dressed as a woman and gorgeously adorned with all the ornaments which the Balahi women of the village may lend to him, sings the first verse of a song in honour of Sri Krishna. The chorus repeats the verse. They sing of Krishna's birth and heroic deeds and miracles during his fight with the demons. The other villagers listen with rapt attention and join in the singing as well as they can. Only the women sit apart and keep silent. They never dance and sing in the presence of men.

A drama is often staged as well; very popular is a scene in which the *kotwal* appears on the stage, commissioned with the order to provide a damsel for a love-sick god. The *kotwal* plays the fool and pretends not to understand. This gives ample opportunity for

ambiguous allusions and jokes which the Balahis find highly diverting and enjoyable. The different scenes are interrupted by songs and dances.

At midnight the merry entertainment stops. It is the moment of Krishna's birth. The *sadhu* asks for a brass plate (*arti*) to be brought with all the ingredients required for the *hom* sacrifice: rice grains, *kuku*, *kapur*, *pan*, *kesar*, a *diya* filled with *ghi* and a wick in it, and the *nainai* (the nine ingredients required for the preparation of the *tika*). The *sadhu* takes a handful of *joari* flour and draws a *chauk*. Before the *chauk* he places a pile of wood chips which he lights. In front of the fire he places the *arti*. Then he squats down before the fire and pours *ghi* into the flames. This is the *hom* sacrifice. Then he lights the small earthen lamps filled with *ghi* and pours *kapur* into the fire. He lifts up the *arti* with the lighted lamps and moves it slowly and solemnly in a circle over the assembled crowd, while the *sadhu's* disciples ring bells and blow the conch. All the people fold their hands and worship the bright little flames on the brass plate: it is the symbol of Krishna. They believe that through the light which represents the eternal and infinite life of the Divine Being the spark of life in every man is kindled and preserved. The lights on the *arti* are kept burning throughout the night and anxious care is taken that no sudden blast of the breeze puts it out.

After the sacrifice the singing and dancing is taken up once more and kept going until dawn. Nobody goes to sleep in this night.

At day-break a new ceremony takes place. It is called *maha-prashad* <sup>87)</sup> and is a kind of initiation for the Balahi boys and girls. It may also be performed on adults if they have not yet been initiated. But the usual age of the children to be initiated is from eight to ten years. It is the same ceremony which is performed on high-caste boys when they are invested with the sacred thread.

The *guru*, a Balahi *sadhu*, takes his seat on a platform which is called *gaddi* (throne), tucking his legs neatly under his thighs. The boys and girls who are to be initiated stand before him in a row. Two and two now they approach him and sit down, one on his right, the other on his left thigh. The boys carry a coconut in their hands, the girls wheat grain which is tied in a corner of their scarf. After the children have sat down on the knees of their *guru*, a sheet is spread over them. The *guru* brings his mouth near the ear first of the child on his right thigh, then near that of the child on his

<sup>87)</sup> *prasāda*, in Sanskrit, means favour; also, propitiatory offering, or the remnants of food presented to an idol or left by a spiritual teacher. This latter aspect has given its name to the whole ceremony.

left and whispers the holy name "OUM", which among many other interpretations is supposed to be an abbreviation of the three most sacred aspects of the Divine Being, "generation, preservation, and destruction", O (Vishnu), U (Shiva) and M (Brahma).

Then the *guru* gives them three precepts which they should observe faithfully throughout their life: He says "*Guru hai. Apne guru ka bachan manna!* (There is a spiritual leader. Obey his orders.) *Paramatma ka darsit darua* (Worship God!) *Apne pati se chhor pray pati ki ichcha nahi karna* (Do not desire another man's wife [or another woman's husband])." He further adds: "*Ajkar teri kaya pap se bhari hui andhere chipi thi, ab main ahim nam par kripa aphis deta hung. Isse teri kaya men Ishwar ki ujyala howi!* (Up to now your soul has been full of sin and submerged in darkness, Now in the infinite God's name, I give you a blessing full of grace. May God's light be in your soul by virtue of this blessing!)"

After these words the sheet is taken off and the children are told to get up. Their initiation into the mysteries of their religion is herewith accomplished. All shout: "God Krishna be praised!" After the last child has been initiated, the *guru* again lifts up the *arti* waving it over the children and praying: "*Sat-chit-anand, kapur arti jyot: Krishna Bhagwan ki jai! Jinhone mujhe agyan ka jyot ka ujyala diya aur pap se chhora ya mere is guru ko bhi Ishwariy shakti se sach dhanyabad ho jo jita aur shiksha deta rahe aur papiyon ka pap dur rahe dhanya ho!* (True God! Light on the plate of camphor, God Krishna be praised! He has given me his law's light and taken away my sin. Also my *guru* be praised and may God bless him! He gives life and wisdom and takes away the sin of sins. Praise to him! <sup>88</sup>)

The Balahis believe that no man can go to God unless the *guru* has spoken these words into his ear. A man or child who dies without this initiation, will go to a place without sorrow, but also without joy.

Now the parents of the initiated children come to the *guru* and present him their gifts, a coconut and one rupee four annas. This is called *guru ka bheth: guru's* present. Poor parents sometimes pay only half the usual amount. The *guru* often collects a goodly sum if many children have been initiated.

But the money is not to be kept long in his house. He goes to the bazaar and buys provisions for a festive meal. All his followers and disciples are invited to take part. The banquet takes place on

<sup>88</sup>) I am fully aware that the Hindi text, recorded here, is often faulty, but I wanted to repeat the very words which my informant, a Balahi Sadhu, used.

the ninth day of the month and is called *guru badhera*. In the evening the *guru* accompanied by his disciples who ring bells and blow the conch goes round and invites all his followers to the banquet: He shouts: "*Panch ki pari ko ana! Hare, hare Ganga! Come to the banquet — Oh, Ganga!*"

After the meal there is the usual dancing and singing until late into night.

On the fifteenth day another ceremony takes place: The Cradle-feast — *jhulna gyara*. It is celebrated at the house of a Balahi who has made the vow to celebrate this feast, if Krishna would grant him the blessing of male offspring. When his prayer has been answered, he invites the villagers to his house, well decorated with paper and leaf garlands.

The boy, dressed gaily as Krishna Kanya and holding a flute in his hands, is brought before Krishna's pole. A hammock is hung up between two posts and the boy is rocked while hymns are sung in honour of Sri Krishna. Then the *sadhu* comes. He brings along a brass image of Krishna which he places on a sheet before the pole. Then he worships the image with the usual offering of coconuts, *kapur*, *kuku* etc.

After that the child's father gives a banquet to all the villagers. The *sadhu* too takes part. He also gets a handsome present for his performance, usually a turban or loin-cloth and one rupee four annas.

After the meal the villagers sing and dance and make merry till day-break. God Krishna is one of the favourite gods of the Balahis. A great number of Balahis bear names which are derived from the god's various attributes.

#### (7) Bhawani Nawratra — Dasahra

During the nine days preceding Dasahra, from the first to the ninth day of Kuar (September-October), the Balahis worship Bhawani *mata*, the protectress of Ravan (demon king of Lanka and kidnapper of Rama's wife Sita) and the mother of all the *bariwas* (magicians).

On the first—according to other sources, on the fourth—day of the month of Kuar every *bariwa* sows wheat in baskets full of black soil. These baskets are called *kurkay* and in reality form a combination of five or seven small baskets, stuck one above the other on a stout bamboo pole which passes through the bottom of all the baskets. The *kurkay* is made by the basket-maker (Chermal) and can be bought ready-made in the market.

Day and night the *bariwa* guards, tends and waters the seedlings, anxious lest anybody touch them or straying cattle eat them up. The

*barwa* may not charge anybody else however trustworthy with the care of his seedlings. For it is a matter of life and death — if any harm came to the seedlings, the *barwa*, it is believed, would have to expect certain death as punishment for his carelessness! Therefore no *barwa* will leave the village during these nine days preceding Dasahra. The seedlings are so carefully tended because they represent Bhawani *mata* herself, the supreme *mata* of the *barwas*.

On the ninth day of the month, which is also called Naw Durga, the *barwas* perform their annual sacrifice in honour of Bhawani *mata*. In the evening each *barwa* goes to the small hut (generally built just beside his house) where he keeps the image of his *deo* or *mata*, and where during these nine days the *kurkay* with the wheat-seedlings was also being kept. The *barwa-mar*, as this diminutive hut is called, can easily be recognised by the white flag that hangs from the top of a high bamboo pole at the side of the hut.

Before the image of the *barwa's deo* or *mata* (usually a small figure of brass or stone) in front of the wheat baskets (also called *bari* — garden) the *barwa* offers *kuku*, *sendhur*, lemons, a pumpkin (*kihila*) and sacrifices a cock. Then, invoking his *deo*, he smokes a pipe of *ganja* (hemp) or drinks a glass of *daru* (liquor) which brings him into the right disposition for the advent of his *deo*. Soon he begins to tremble in all his limbs, he wags his head and rolls his eyes, a sure sign that the *deo* is taking possession of him.

The attendants of the *barwa*, his relatives or followers (*chela*), assist him and hold him, when he seems likely to fall to the ground in convulsions. They shake him and wake him up when he is falling into a trance. In this state they bring him to a near river or pond. They also take a basket along filled with pieces of pumpkin and lemons, and other articles required for the offering. The *barwa* himself carries on his head the basket with the wheat seedlings, which are now about six inches long, while other men in the group around him beat the *barwa's* drum (*dhak*) which has the form of an hour-glass and is covered at both ends with a lizzard skin.

The other *barwas* of the village likewise assemble at the river with their attendants, and a crowd of villagers walk in procession to the river or *nala*, throwing about pieces of pumpkin and shouting "*Bhawani mata ki jai!*" and beating the drums in a wild rhythm.

At the river, where the huge boulder which represents *Ghatwala deo* or *Mahishasur* rests in the water, the procession halts. *Mahishasur* or *Maisoba* is the demon god who was slain by the goddess. He is the buffalo god and is believed to live under the water of a river or pond. He is worshipped in a huge boulder near the spot where cattle and carts cross the river. At the stone that represents the god, a pumpkin is broken into pieces and offered to the god,

as well as lemons which are cut into halves. Then the baskets with the wheat-seedlings are placed on the ground. Often an unmarried girl is seated near the baskets and worshipped. The girl represents the goddess who was a virgin. After that the *barwas* carry the baskets into the river. The heavy earth-filled baskets instantly sink to the bottom. During the whole performance the *barwas* and their attendants drum and dance without restraint in a frenzy of emotion. But after the baskets have been exposed to the water, the excitement soon abates, and they say: "*deo thanda hogaya, deo ne pani leliya* — The *deo* has calmed down, he has taken to the water."

Only now the other villagers who watched the performance from some distance may approach. They embrace the *barwas* and greet them with "Ram! Ram!"

Soon every *barwa*, though exhausted and perspiring, looks his old self again. The nine preceding days have been a heavy strain on their nerves, because they had to expect great misfortune and perhaps even death, had their basket of seedlings come to harm or had they for any reason been prevented from making the sacrifice of the goat or cock which their tutelary *deo* or *mata* demands on this day. This annual tribute must be paid by every *barwa* to the deity for the service which is rendered him throughout the year and for the power of healing and exorcising the evil spirits in the sick.

After the ceremony at the river all return to the village. A festive dinner is prepared which brings the whole performance to a satisfactory end.

At the time when the *barwas* go to the river, the women of the village sweep the house and give its walls and floor a coating with fresh cow-dung. Then all the villagers take a bath, either at the village well, or sitting on a cot at home; they also wash their clothes.

The *kotwal*, usually a Balahi, goes from house to house and collects money for the purchase of a goat or a male buffalo calf (*hela*). He also distributes lemons among the villagers. The *patel* then buys a goat which should be black, or a *hela*. Nowadays the Hindus prefer a goat which they can afterwards eat themselves for their victim, while the meat of the *hela* after the sacrifice must be given to the low-caste people, since they are not allowed to eat buffalo meat.

In the late afternoon all villagers are invited to assemble at the *patel's* house. From there they go in procession to the shrine of Hanuman, the tutelary god of the Hindu villages in the Nimar. There the *patel*, or one of the notables of the village takes a sword or a big knife and wounds the animal on the back near the tail. The lamed

and profusely bleeding victim is dragged around the village and back to Hanuman's shrine. A man walks behind the goat or *hela* and pours water over the trail of blood it leaves behind. Sometimes the villagers take away the blood-soaked mud and carry it to their fields to ensure fertility.

At last the village headman cuts off the victim's head.

The meat of the sacrificial victim is distributed among the worshippers, taken home, boiled and eaten. If the victim is a buffalo calf (*hela*), the *patel* strikes it with his sword, but not to death. It is the *kotwal* who kills the victim with an axe, cuts it to pieces and distributes the meat among his caste-fellows. For the higher castes are not permitted to eat buffalo meat. The skin of the victim is taken by the *kotwal*, while its bones, horns, entrails, etc. are buried. Sometimes the victim is a boar. In this case the whole body is buried after the slaying, because not even Balahis may eat the meat of domesticated pigs.

After the sacrifice all the villagers return to their houses. They cut lemons in halves which they lay on the threshold of their doors, at the gates of their court-yards and hay-lofts. Also the bullock-carts, ploughs, and other agricultural tools and implements are blessed in the same manner. The Balahis offer not only lemons, but also white pumpkins (*boria khola*). In the evening there is a festive meal in all families. Wealthy farmers sometimes invite their servants also to the meal if they are of the same caste, else they send the dishes to their houses.

The next day is the principal feast-day of Dasahra. All remain at home and celebrate the day with a good meal. At about four in the afternoon the bullock carts are made ready. The men mount the carts and drive to the village jungle to an *asthora* bush (a tree with small eatable white flowers). All villagers who own a cart take part, often racing their bullocks with shouts of "*Raja Dasrat ki jai!* Hail, King Dasrat!" The village land-lord or headman usually leads the race as he has the best bullocks. At the *asthora* bush they stop. All alight. A Brahman or Kumar (potter) pours out water at the base of the tree, and offers *sendhur*, *kuku*, coconuts etc. Then he says: "*Raja Dasrat ka sona lelol* Here, King Dasrat's gold, take!" The villagers rush to the spot and each man takes away a handful of the wet soil from under the tree and plucks some leaves from it.

On the way back to the village the men cut some *joari* spikes (*dandela*, *toṭa*) from the fields through which they pass. They throw these *joari* spikes and balls of the sacred soil, as well as the leaves on the roofs of their houses, and into their grain barns (*kothi*) that they may never be empty of grain. The barns are painted with *kuku*, *sendhur*, and rice, and worshipped.

Sometimes the Balahis make a special offering at the boundary stones of their fields. Whatever they have promised to offer at the time of sowing, or when excessive rains or scarcity of rain threatened their crops they now fulfil. A goat, a cock, or a few coconuts are offered to Durga, the goddess of fertility.

In the evening after another festive meal, the villagers assemble at the house of the landlord (*malguzar*) or headman. He offers them *pan*, and to poor villagers he gives also a pound or two of *joari*. All greet him, touching the ground in front of him with folded hands, and then go home.

The mythical origin of the feast is said to be this:

During the nine nights of *Nawratni*, Kali, the celestial consort of Shiva, made an appeal for the destruction of the demon Bhandassura, the embodiment in buffalo form of physical desires. The slaying of the demon is imitated by the sacrifice of the buffalo calf. The legend relates that Kali herself slew the two demon leaders, Chanda and Manda, and thus gained the title Chamundi. By this name, Chawanda, some Balahi clans worship Durga as their goddess. Formerly, on that occasion or on Dasahra, they offered a boy in sacrifice but now a goat or a buffalo calf takes the boy's place. But many Balahi clans have given up this sacrifice altogether and worship their clan mother only at Dasahra in the manner of the Hindu castes.

This feast is also a commemoration of the day on which Rama, the son of Dasrat, started on his expedition to Lanka for the rescue of his wife Sita from the hands of Ravan, the demon king of Lanka. This explains the invocation of king Dasrat at the ceremony under the *asthora* bush.

The worship of this tree (which is probably the *barwi* tree of the Mahabharata) is connected with the five Pandava brothers who buried their arms under this tree before they went into exile. When the years of banishment were over, Arjuna vowed to worship the tree every year if he found the arms still safely hidden where they had been buried. That vow is fulfilled by the villagers on the day of Dasahra when they drive in their carts to the jungle and worship the *asthora* tree.

The Balahis, of course, do not take any prominent part in the celebration of Dasahra, nor in the performance of the various offerings by the high-caste Hindus, except perhaps in that of the *kotwal* acting in his capacity as village watchman. In all the ceremonies which the Balahis themselves perform they follow the Hindu ritual. Only at Binankhera, a village about ten miles east of Khandwa, the Balahis perform a peculiar ceremony which possibly is a genuine Balahi rite since it is performed exclusively by them.

In the evening of the principal day of Dasahra, after sunset, the men of the Balahi *basti* (quarter) assemble at the house of the *kotwal* who entertains them with a few bottles of *daru* (country liquor). Also the village *patel* supplies a few bottles in order to get the men into the right mood for the performance of the following ceremony:

The *kotwal* brings an earthen pot (*handi*) into which he pours several handfuls of ashes. Then he adds a *kauri* shell, several spiced wheat cakes (*bajia*), a coil of human hair, a few pods of red pepper (*mirchi*), and pours *daru* over the whole mixture. The pot with all the ingredients is called *bal* (power?). Around the earthen pot the *kotwal* puts a netting of ropes (*sikka*). Then a bamboo pole is pushed through the netting and the pot lifted by means of the pole which two men take on their shoulders. Then the *kotwal* spreads a sheet (*chaddar*) over it.

About an hour before mid-night the *kotwal* fetches a big *lota* into which he pours an equal quantity of water and *daru*. Then he and the carriers of the *bal*, accompanied by the other Balahis, proceed to the shrine of the village god, called *mel da deo*. From the shrine of the village-god the procession now takes a circuitous route around the whole village, not excluding a single house. All the way the *kotwal* sprinkles his *daru* diluted with water, while the other men make a lot of noise and shout incessantly: "*Bale, bale, irha pırha khas khokla, Mandawgarh dokhri ko jai lage!*" The words recorded here are untranslatable, but the obvious idea is to exorcise the spirits of disease and misfortune, to erect, so to say, a spiritual wall around the village impassable to these spirits. These are diverted to a mythical village Mandawgarh which is supposed to exist somewhere in the Satpura mountains.

While the Balahis wander round the village, shouting noisily, the owners of male buffalo calves in the village are anxiously concerned to prevent their animals from hearing the sound of the shouting which the Balahis make on their procession. They therefore try to drown the noise of the procession by making a greater noise near the shed where the animals are kept. They beat tin cans or brass vessels, and shout as loudly as they can. For they believe that the spirit of the *bal* lives in male buffalo calves, and that consequently their own calves would die if they heard the words which the Balahis shout during the procession.

On the following day the Balahis carry the *bal* around in the village, visiting every house and begging for foodstuff and grain, or old clothes. When all have paid their dues, the earthen pot is thrown away, somewhere outside the village.

## (8) Diwali

The feast of Diwali is celebrated on the 14th day of Kartik (October or November). The day before, on *Diwali ka dhanteras*, the house is cleaned and smeared with cowdung. All take a bath and wash their clothes. In the evening they draw a *chauk* on the floor of the main room, put a rupee (if available) on it and worship it, offering *kuku*, rice etc. Boys and girls are also painted with *kuku*, then the cattle, agricultural tools and the furniture of the house. If anybody has jewels or rupees hidden in the ground or in a box, he need not take them out, but puts the offerings on top of them.

The next day, the 14th of Kartik, the Balahis remember their deceased forefathers and relatives. If, however, as it sometimes happens when a fairly wealthy man dies, the funeral feast has not taken place in the village, but at Onkarji (*Mandhata*), in that case there is no offering for the deceased at Diwali, but on the anniversary of his death, *sola sradh ka din*, as they call it. But for the deceased whose funeral banquet has been celebrated in the home-village, the offering should be performed at Diwali. All members of the family take a bath and wash their clothes. In the main room a *chauk* is drawn on the floor with *joari* flour; bread, *gur*, rice, *dal*, sugar, and other eatables are brought in plates and pots and set down beside the *chauk*. A fire is lit in front of it. Then the head of the family pours *ghi* on the flames as an offering for the dead. Mentioning the name of a deceased relative, he takes a portion of all the dishes and puts it down beside the fire. He performs this sacrifice for as many relatives as he can remember. The fire represents the goddess, who acts as witness during the performance. Then a man takes a *lota* with water, in the other hand he carries a plate with *gur*, rice, sugar, *dal* etc. He leaves the house. At the door he spills water on the roof, and puts the food on it saying: "*Pos, pos, koi gayo hoi to ayyavo* (Come, come. Who have died, may come). *Jo an chhe, pani chhe, bhariya ki pal chhe* (Here is food, here is water, here is a rich meal)." He calls the name of his clan and of all his deceased forefathers, as many as he can remember.

The crows soon discover the food on the roof and come for their meal. It is meant for them. If many crows gather, the Balahis are glad and believe that their ancestors are well pleased with them. But if the crows do not come, then the Balahis are frightened and say: "Our ancestors are angry." And they take steps to reconcile them by a special offering. Crows are sacred to the Balahis who will not kill them.

The same ceremony is repeated on the day of the new moon.

On the following day, the horns of cows and buffaloes are decorated with strings or cowrie shells and peacock feathers, then

the owners of the animals dip the palms of their hands in red or white paint and stamp the bodies of their cattle with large marks. White cattle are painted red, black or red animals receive white marks. Then the animals are driven to the meeting place with whoops and yells. Their owners, standing nearby, smash an earthen pot on the posts of the gate that leads to the cattle shed. It is a charm to ward off the effects of the evil eye.

At Diwali the Balahis, like many other Hindus, indulge in gambling. There are often passionate gamblers among them and many a Balahi has lost his hard-earned savings in the Diwali night. People relate the story of a man who lost his cattle, house and field to a Mohammedan in such a night, and in his passion he staked at last his wife as well. He lost. The woman was in fact handed over to the Mohammedan who took her to his house. But he was a respectable man and as soon as they arrived at his house, he returned all the jewels which he had won from the woman's husband to her, gave her a new *lagra*, touched her feet with folded hands and sent her home. Only the house and the fields of the unfortunate gambler did he retain.

The usual gambling is done by cards or by dice. If the players have no cards they play with pebbles. One man takes a handful of small pebbles. So do his partners. Each player puts a *paisa* at stake. If the number of pebbles of any one agrees with the odd or even number of pebbles of the man who holds the bank, he wins, while the others lose. If the players stake only *paisas*, they can win or lose only a few rupees, but at Diwali time they often gamble for high stakes.

#### (9) Gyaras Kobri

This feast is celebrated eleven days after Diwali, on the eleventh day of the second half of Kartik. The legend relates that on Diwali a Rakshas, Jeri Jodan by name, died. But the god Shiva had promised him beforehand that he would revive him after eleven days, which actually happened on Gyaras Kobri.

On this day the Balahis celebrate the resurrection of the Rakshas and the beginning of the harvesting season. But only Balahis who are in the possession of fields and bullocks perform the following ceremonies:

The head of the family must fast the whole day. He also must take a bath and wash his clothes.

In the evening he goes to his field and plucks out eleven *joari* stalks which he must not cut off with a sickle, but tear out with the root. After that he looks about for an Aonla tree (*Phyllanthus embica*) and plucks five fruits from it. Then he digs out a handful

of groundnuts and gathers leaves of the Wochan bush (*Acorus colamus?*). At home he takes wheat flour and bakes a flat cake which he breaks into crumbs. Then he makes five balls from the crumbs.

Next, the floor of the main room is swept and coated with cow-dung. After that the man takes *joari* flour and draws a *chauk* on the floor. Then he builds a pyramid of *joari* stalks over the *chauk*, tying the stalks together at the top with the stem of a sugar-cane. Then he puts five stones on the *chauk*, also the five balls of bread-crumbs, the five Aonla fruits, the ground-nuts, besides some vegetables and leaves. These are the first fruits of the new harvest. Over the whole he sprinkles sacred *kuku* powder.

Then he takes a *lota* full of water, washes his face and cleanses his mouth. Then, the *lota* in one hand, he plucks with the other some spikes of *joari* from the stalks tied to the pyramid. He beats the spikes against the *lota* so that the water splashes on the pyramid and on the pile of fruits under it. Sprinkling the water, he walks five times around the pyramid, saying: "*Aula, saula, bor, bhaji, chuni ka tarja, nawe ka uthore Deo-Hom*. — (Aonla fruits, ground-nuts, bor fruits, vegetables, in their old form have been restored to new life by God *Hom*)."

From this day on the Balahis begin again to call the *barwa*, to worship *deos* and *matas*, to make marriage matches. They say that during the previous months the gods were asleep and did not like to be disturbed. But it is rather, that the peasants had no time or mind during the busy rainy season for long religious ceremonies. Now, in the beginning of the harvest, they again remember their gods.

The *joari* spikes are hung up in the house as a charm against evil spirits.

## Part V

### The Material Culture of the Balahis

The Balahis have no material culture of their own by which they could be distinguished from the tribes and castes among whom they abide. It is more than probable that their contribution to the development of the material culture of India has been almost nil, for even in the art of weaving which is their traditional handicraft they are not very proficient. In no sphere whatever of the material culture are the Balahis what we may call creative and original, they follow everywhere the example of the people with whom they live, not only in their ways of living, dressing and eating, but also in

the choice of their occupation, and in the use of their tools and implements.

If we consider each branch of material culture separately, we will find nothing peculiar in economic life of the Balahis. There is nothing that they have invented or specially developed. There is no craft or occupation for which they show a special skill or for which they have a certain preference; neither in their dress nor in their diet nor in anything else do the Balahis distinguish themselves. But if we consider all parts of the Balahi culture together, as an integrate whole, we find that the Balahis have tried, and to a certain extent succeeded in, making the most of the peculiar circumstances and conditions in which they are placed socially and economically. The peculiar mentality of the Balahis has expressed itself not in inventing a material culture of its own, but in adopting such forms of economy and choosing such means of livelihood created by the superior castes and races of the country as are most suitable to themselves.

Their economical dependence on the agricultural castes has made the Balahis wisely desist from cultivating any too striking peculiarities in dress and ways of living, and obliged them to conform themselves more or less to the ways of living of their masters, while their social inferiority prevented them from going too far in this imitation of their superiors. The Balahis could not afford any peculiarities which would make them too different from the people on whom they depend for their livelihood, nor were they encouraged to develop any special abilities which would emancipate them from the domination of their masters. The material culture of the Balahis consequently shows all the common and only too uniform features of Indian village life. The only distinction is greater poverty, less comfort, and the lack of many of the little superfluities and scant luxuries which so much enliven the dreary and hard life of the Indian peasant.

## Chapter XXVI

### Clothing and Ornaments

#### (1) Clothing

The wearing apparel of the Balahis consists mainly of loom-made articles, as far as possible untouched by needle and scissors. Only the *angarkha*, a coat, which covers the upper part of the body of the male Balahi, and the *choli* (bodice) which covers the breasts of the Balahi woman, are sewn by a tailor. But these garments are of comparatively recent origin, likewise the shirt, which is now even more common among the Balahis than the *angarkha*. All other garments of a Balahi's wardrobe consist of mere oblong pieces of

cloth, arranged in such a manner as to provide sufficient covering without impairing freedom of movement.

Though the weaving of cloth is the traditional handicraft of the Balahi caste, their art has apparently never been perfected to the tailoring of dresses: the noble art of the needle is conspicuously unknown among the Balahis. Balahi women appear very clumsy in handling needle and thread when they, as it rarely happens, try to mend a torn dress. This remarkable lack of skill in sewing is perhaps the reason why the clothes of the Balahis are so soon outworn: a small hole is never stitched nor a rent in a dress closed, to prevent further damage. Sometimes the loose ends of a torn garment are simply tied together or a big hole is closed by drawing its edges together and tying a thread around them. The Balahis are very careless in their dress and often go about in rags.

In their dress the Balahis usually follow the fashion of the tribes and castes among whom they abide. In the southern parts of the Holkar State where the population is predominantly aboriginal, the Balahis are as scantily clad as the Bhils and Bhilalas. In regions where they live with the better dressed cultivating castes, they have adopted their attire, and in towns and market places they often dress in the western fashion. It is the custom in this part of India that a servant receives the discarded clothes of his master, thus the Balahis who are mostly servants and labourers naturally adopt the fashion of their employers.

#### (a) The Wardrobe of the Male Balahi

The traditional attire of the male Balahi consists of a loincloth (*keiti* or *dhoti*), a coat (*angarkha* or *angarsa*) or shirt (*qamiz*), and a head-cover (*pagri* or *topi*).

The *keiti* is an oblong piece of cloth, two to three yards in length and about two feet in breadth. It is passed between the thighs and the ends are drawn up in front and at the back between the body and a waist-band in such a way that the ends hang down over the waist-band in full breadth so that they cover the front and the back of the lower portion of the body, leaving the hips and thighs uncovered. The waist-band is of cotton and consists of several strings twisted into one. It is usually of red colour, with amulets dangling down. The waist-band is worn by all Balahis from earliest childhood, long before babies begin to wear a shirt.

Nowadays the *keiti*, which is the oldest fashion in loin-cloths, is worn only by Balahis living among the aborigines of the Holkar portion of the Nimar District. In the Central Provinces the *keiti* is only occasionally worn by old and poor Balahis, or in sickness

when it is too troublesome to tie a *dhotti*. Balahi males now everywhere dress in *dhottis* arranged after the fashion of the caste-Hindus. The *dhotti* is a piece of white cloth, five to six yards long and more than a yard broad.

When the Balahi dons his *dhotti*, he holds half of the cloth folded in a bunch in front of his body, while he wraps the other half tightly around his waist. After he has tied the corners of the cloth firmly in front, he draws the lower ends between his thighs and tucks them in at the back under the waist-band. Instead of the older cotton waist-band nowadays many Balahis wear a strong nickel chain. The Balahis' manner of arranging their loin-cloth does not produce a graceful effect, the thick bunches of cloth in front and especially at the back rather disfigure the shape of the body.

In former times a Balahi was not permitted to wear his loin-cloth after the fashion of the caste-Hindus, and in many villages the latter still demand that the Balahi wears his *dhotti* at the most down to his knees, leaving the lower portion of the legs uncovered. This rule is, however, only enforced in villages where the Balahis are a small minority or where they are still very backward.

The cloth which the Balahis prefer for their *dhottis* is not the home-woven *khaddar* — as they call it, but mill-moven cloth. Even the weavers among the Balahis prefer mill-moven *dhottis* to their own product, which, as they admit, is too coarse for their liking.

To cover the upper portion of the body the older Balahi generation wore a coat (*angarkha* or *angarsa*) reaching down almost to the knees. This coat has long sleeves and is open in front. It has flaps folding over the breast which are tied with strings over the right breast. This coat is made of hand-woven cloth, coarse and unbleached. No shirt is worn under the *angarsa* which is manufactured by the tailor.

For his wedding the bridegroom wears an *angarkha* not of unbleached hand-woven cloth, but of red silk. After the wedding is over, it is worn also on other festive occasions, but usually it is only too soon torn to rags.

Nowadays many Balahis wear coats cut in the western fashion of mill-woven cloth, over a shirt. Such coats are often purchased in the bazaar from second-hand dealers.

Instead of the old-fashioned *angarkha*, most Balahis now wear shirts either of hand-woven coarse cloth or of thin mill-woven material. The shirt has always long sleeves and is cut in the western fashion. The slit at the neck is closed with cheap buttons, sometimes even with silver buttons on a silver chain. The shirts are made by a tailor and bought from the store or in the bazaar.

Over the shirt Balahis often wear a short, tightly fitting waist-coat or jacket without sleeves. Usually it is white and of unbleached material, sometimes of red silk.

The Balahis rarely go about without a cover for the upper part of the body. Only in the evening in the hot season when they are at home do they take off their shirt or the *angarkha*.

In the cold season the Balahis wrap head and shoulders in a large sheet of thick hand-woven cloth, which is called *pichhori*. Since the usual hand-woven sheets are not broad enough, two pieces are sewn together to make a *pichhori*. This sheet is also used as a cover for the night. When on a journey, the *pichhori* is tied in folds around the waist. In the rainy season it is folded in such a way as to cover head and shoulders like a hood. The *pichhori*, or a sheet of thinner cloth (*chaddar*), is also used for carrying various things. The provisions bought in the market are tied into different corners and folds of the sheet. Then one end is drawn over the right shoulder while the other end is passed under the left arm, and both ends are joined in front. Even heavy weights can be carried quite comfortably in this way.

The *pichhori* appears to be the oldest garment of the Balahis for the covering of the upper part of the body. In the forest tracts of the southern Holkar State it is still worn instead of a shirt or coat. In the cold season such a sheet is worn by every Balahi over his shirt or coat. The Balahis maintain that the cold air enters the body through ears and the mouth. Therefore they wrap their sheet carefully around the head, over ears and mouth, while they do not mind it if other parts of the body and the legs remain uncovered.

The head-cover of the Balahis is an oblong piece of thin white or red cloth, about ten yards long and half a yard broad. Usually it is twisted to a narrow band and tied around the head, in a more or less negligent manner which is characteristic of this people. Sometimes a white and a red cloth are taken together and wrapped around the head. The cloth, often leaving the top of the skull bare, is called *pagri*. A turban of thin and coloured cloth, tied in broad folds, is called *sapha*; such a head-gear is worn only by wealthy Balahis.

Nowadays also the so-called *topi*, a round cap, has come into fashion among the Balahis. The cap is about six inches high, of stiff paper, covered with cloth. It is usually of black or dark brown colour. Less frequently used by the Balahis are the so-called Gandhi-caps, formed like a *topi*, but of unbleached cloth without a paper stiffening.

Outside their houses, the Balahis do not usually walk about with their head uncovered. But they are not as fastidious as other

people about their head-dress. Often it is merely an old rag that they wrap around their heads, scarcely sufficient to cover the skull, and not very clean. The ends of the turban are often used to hold small coins or tobacco. In the cold season one end of the turban is often tied around the ears and the mouth if no sheet is at hand.

Shoes (*juta*) the Balahis wear only in the summer when the hot soil burns even the thick soles of their feet to blisters, or on a journey and during field-work, as a protection against thorns and stones. The common country shoe is of buffalo leather, thick and stiff, the thick sole being sewn to the upper leather. The top of the shoe has a sharp edge. A pair of shoes which costs about a rupee and a half (before the war) is worn till it falls to pieces. The Balahis take off their shoes when they enter a house or cow-shed, and also when they meet a person to whom they want to show their respect. It is considered very ignominious to be slapped with a shoe.

Nowadays also shoes and boots, made in the western fashion, are much in demand. Especially boys and young men fancy them. Not used to wearing them, they soon get sore feet and limp pitifully, but in spite of severe discomfort they cannot be persuaded to return to their more comfortable country shoes. As shoes are rather expensive, a single pair often serves a whole family, which, naturally, does not prolong their durability.

Sandals (*chapat*) are rarely worn by Balahis.

Since the Balahi has no pockets in his dress, except for a large pocket on the inside of his coat, or perhaps a small pocket at one side of his shirt, he carries his other belongings in a sheet. But his money he cannot safely entrust to his pockets (which are seldom without holes) nor to the sheet. Therefore he carries his money in a baggy belt knit of strong cords. This purse (*thaili*) is tied carefully around the waist under the shirt or coat.

#### (b) The Wardrobe of the Balahi Woman

The Balahis maintain that the dress of the Balahi woman has changed scarcely at all in the course of centuries, and is very old in design. The usual attire of the Balahi female consists of only two pieces of cloth: the *lugra*, a large sheet which covers the lower portion of the body, the back, and the head; and the *choli* (or *angia*), a bodice, which covers and supports the breasts.

The *lugra* is about 16 *hath* (cubits) in length and about four to five feet in breadth. In donning it, the woman holds one end of the *lugra* in a bunch in front, while with the other hand she wraps the cloth around her body. Then the upper part of the end in front

is tucked tightly in between body and waist-band, while the lower part of the same end is passed between the legs in a baggy, low-hanging fold and tucked in at the back. The other end of the *lugra* is drawn over the back, the shoulders and the head, and falls down at the side just covering the elbow of the right arm. The wrappings around the body are arranged in such a way that the cloth covers the thighs and the lower part of the body in two or three layers.

The *lugra* is usually of mill-woven, rather thin cloth, of a bright red, dark red, dark blue or black colour. Many Balahi clans forbid their female members to wear a *lugra* of white or yellow colour, as this is supposed to be the colour of the main garment of their clan-goddess' dress. A plain white *lugra* is sometimes worn by a Balahi widow or by a woman who wants to appear as a *sadhu* (devotee).

The *lugra*, as worn by the female Balahis, is used also by the women of other castes resident on the Central Plateau and in the south of India. "It is a style inherited from a remote antiquity, descendant from the dresses seen even on Buddhist carvings in the great rock temples of the Deccan"<sup>89</sup>). Today the Balahi women have this fashion in common with the Maratha, the Mahar and Koli women. It differs more or less from the fashion of dress of castes resident in Rajputana and Gujrat, and the north of India. It is also distinct from the female attire of the Bhils and Bhilalas with whom the Balahis of the Nimar live together in the hilly tracts. The extremely slowly changing dress of the women in India would lead us to conclude that the Balahis were since many generations residents of the central parts of India and neighbours of the Marathas, the Mahars and Kolis.

The *lugra* of a Balahi woman is not a very fine specimen of female wearing apparel. Usually of plain colour, with only a simple ornament along the hem, which is washed out only too soon, the cloth is often too stiff and coarse to fall down in graceful folds. The end which passes between the legs and is tucked under the waist-band in front and at the back, forms an unwieldy bunch of cloth in front and at the back and thus disfigures the lines of the female body. Nor is the *lugra* a practical garment for the working woman, especially in the monsoon or when a stiff breeze is blowing. The women have much trouble in catching the ever-dropping end of the *lugra* and in re-arranging it over head and shoulders, when at work. Besides, only the right hand is completely free (unless occupied with holding the end of the *lugra*) while the left hand is more or less covered under the cloth.

<sup>89</sup>) OTTO ROTHFELD, *Women of India*, Bombay 1928, p. 188.

This unwieldiness of the *lugra* is probably the reason why some Balahi women now prefer to wear a petticoat (*layenga*) with a much shorter upper garment (*lugri* or *orhni*). Another reason is that they want to imitate the high-caste women of the Nimar who generally wear petticoats with a short scarf.

This petticoat consists of an oblong piece of cloth, broad enough to cover the body from the waist to the ankles. The hem of one long-side is sewn-in, a string is drawn through the hem and the skirt tied round the waist in such a way that the shortened hem of the one long-side produces many accordion-like pleats falling down to the ankles. The ends of the skirt-cloth are either sewn together or arranged in such a manner that they come in front of the body. Then the lower corners of both ends are taken up, passed tightly between the legs and tucked under the waist-band at the back. This petticoat is called *layenga* or *lahenga*.

Over this petticoat the Balahi women wear the *lugri* (or *orhni*), about half as long as the *lugra*. One end is fastened to the waistband in front, the long-side is wrapped once around the body and drawn over back and head. The *lugri* has the same colour as the *lugra*. It is however lighter and less bothersome for the working Balahi women.

Balahi women are always careful to cover their head in the presence of men though they usually do not conceal their face behind the scarf when they meet strangers.

To support and to cover the breasts the Balahi woman wears a short bodice (*choli*). It is just big enough to cover the breasts, and leaves the back free. It is sewn together of differently coloured pieces of cloth, after a special pattern, so that it accentuates the shape of the breasts. The bodice is put on from the front and tied at the back with two strings.

Balahi girls begin to wear the bodice as soon as their breasts begin to swell, often long before that time. Girls and young women never show their bare breasts, but when they have babies, they do not mind feeding them even before men. Old women sometimes go about without a bodice, but cover the breasts with the end of the *lugra*.

In the cold season Balahi women often wear a sort of jacket, reaching down to the waist, with sleeves reaching to the elbows or wrists. It is called *karta* or *jacket*. This jacket is closed in front with buttons.

Babies in the first years of their life wear nothing at all; as soon as they begin to walk, they get a shirt which ends a little below the waist. This is to prevent it from getting soiled. Boys from five years upwards begin to wear a piece of cloth as a loincloth; the

girls a skirt. As soon as the girls get married, often also before that time, they begin to wear a *lugri* in addition to the petticoat.

Women and girls never wear shoes, except in the hot season, when at work in the fields, or on a journey. But they take off their shoes when they enter the village. A woman should not wear shoes when she meets a man, especially if he is her husband. For work in the fields, the women often wear sandals, or shoes which they borrow from their male relatives.

### Cleaning of Clothes

The Balahi women do all the washing of the clothes, their own as well as that of their male relatives. However, the Balahis are not very tidy or clean as regards their clothes. They usually excuse themselves for their uncleanliness by pointing out that clothes washed frequently wear out too quickly. But usually clothes that are in daily use are washed once a week. On special occasions, on the eve of feast-days, or before certain ceremonies, all take a bath and wash their clothes, though often only too perfunctorily.

For washing the Balahi women rarely use hot water, nor do they boil out the dirty clothes. Generally they just go to the well with their soiled clothes, soak them in water and, folding each piece of cloth separately, they beat it on a flat stone a couple of times. Then they wring it out, pour clean water over it and again beat it on the stone. This procedure is repeated a few times till the cloth is considered to be sufficiently cleaned. Sometimes they do not beat the clothes on a stone, but beat them with a log of wood instead.

The Balahis do not know the use of soap. Where they can get the fruits of the soap-nut tree (*ritha*, *Sapindus mukorossi*), they use the juice of the fruits as a kind of soap. Due to the rather perfunctory method of washing, the Balahis rarely wear properly clean clothes, the loin-cloths and shirts of the men usually having a greyish colour.

## (2) Adornment of the Body

### (a) Dressing of the Hair

The Balahi men have various methods of dressing their hair.

Often the whole skull is shaved with the exception of the *chutti* (a lock of hair on the top of the head). This fashion is called *gota* and is very popular among the Balahis.

Others have the hair of their head cut except for the portion over the ears. This fashion is called *kalam* and is still much in vogue among the aboriginal Bhils and Bhilalas of the southern Holkar State.

Some Balahis have their hair cut all over the head except for a small portion just above the forehead. This manner is called *al*, but it is nowadays out of fashion and jokingly called the "hair-dress of a horse".

Old-fashioned Balahis wear their hair an inch or two long but have a portion over their forehead shaved, in the form of a spear-head. This fashion is called *bhor* and is apparently the old form of arranging their hair.

In the jungle villages of the southern Holkar State many Balahis let their hair grow long like the aboriginal Bhils and Bhilalas. They cut it off at neck-length. This fashion is called *singora*.

The more sophisticated Balahis of the towns and market places prefer the western fashion of hair-dress.

Nearly all Balahis wear the *chutti*, the scalp-lock which occasionally is sacrificed to a *deo* for a cure in sickness.

Only a few Balahi *sadhus* keep their beard unshaved. The other Balahis grow only a moustache, a few let the hair on the cheeks grow, but shave the chin.

Boys wear their hair in the same fashion as the adults. The hair of small children, of boys as well as girls, is often cut off completely, to keep off vermin.

The Balahi women let their hair grow. Only a few widows have it cut off after the fashion of high-caste widows. The women have their hair coiled in a simple twist at the back of the head. The use of a comb is still a rarity. The usual method of cleaning one's hair is by wetting it with water, sweet oil or copra oil, and straining it with the fingers. In order to clean the hair from lice, they rub in kerosene oil. Or they pass the time catching one another's lice. Balahi women can often be seen sitting at the door of a house and inspecting in turns one another's head for lice. Women who are on terms of intimacy like to do this service to each other.

In arranging their hair most of the Balahi women are rather untidy. Many walk about the whole day with their hair unkempt and disorderly, they just cover it with the *lagra*. Girls and young women, however, are generally more tidy and may even go as far as to plait their hair. But when a certain Balahi woman at Khandwa had her hair bobbed in the western fashion, she created a sensation. The good old-fashioned Balahi women wagged their tongues furiously to ruin the reputation of the "fashionable" Balahi lady who dared to imitate the fashion of the "*mem-sahibs*" (European ladies). Thus they successfully prevented other women from following the example of this first fashion-minded Balahi woman!

## (b) Ornaments

Balahi males generally wear few ornaments. Only one or the other of those that will be described presently is worn, at a time.

Of ear-rings the Balahis wear the following kinds: the *murkhi*, a small silver-chain both ends of which are fastened to the ear-lobe. The chain is hung over the auricle so that one half hangs down in front of the ear-hole, the other half behind the auricle. Wealthy Balahis wear a golden *murkhi*.

The *bhauri*, a silver ring which pierces the uppermost part of the auricle. Its diameter is about half an inch.

The *sakrai*, a similar ring in the middle of the ear.

The *sakrai gokhru*, a ring in the ear-lobe to which an ornament in the form of the fruit of *gokhru* (*Tribulus lenuginosus*) is attached.

Balahi men sometimes paint their ears with a red paint which is called *surma*.

Balahi boys and men do not wear any jewels in the nose. Some Balahis have their incisor teeth filed off to a sharp edge. Others have a square hole filed into the incisor teeth, this hole is filled with gold. This operation is performed by the goldsmiths.

Nearly every grown-up Balahi man wears a chain, of silver or nickel, round his waist. In the Holkar State this chain is called *kurudlu*.

Some Balahis wear a ring on the right arm above the elbow, called *dand* or *bhala*. This ring, about half as thick as the little finger has the form of a snake, the tail of which just touches its head at the joint at the back of the elbow.

More frequently do the Balahi men wear silver rings on the wrist of one or both arms. These rings are called *kare* or *vala*. Wealthy Balahis sometimes wear as a lucky charm a broad silver-band with the picture of Ganpati-Ganesh, on the wrist of the right arm.

Every man wears one or more finger-rings. They are called *angutti* or *gol*. Such a ring consists only of a thick silver wire coiled around the finger and clipped off.

Rings worn on the ankles are not very common, they are called *tora* (*turu*) or *beli*.

Most Balahis wear a ring around the big toe. It is called *bela* or *mundi*, also *chutka*. It is believed to prevent stomach-ache.

The men have no peculiar tattoo-marks. Generally they get their name or sometimes the picture of a Hindu deity engraved on the inner side of the fore-arm. These tattoo-marks are engraved by professional tattoo-markers, the Balahis themselves do not know how to make these marks.

Naturally, the Balahi women have a greater number of ornaments though they rarely wear them all at the same time. Only for a wedding or on important Hindu feasts do they appear decked out in all their ornaments and jewels.

Their ornaments are of gold, silver, nickel, or glass; Balahi women do not wear brass ornaments.

On feast-days, wealthy Balahi women and girls wear the golden nose-ring (*nath* or *kutsu*). The *nath* consists of a thin, round or star-shaped golden wire, about an inch in diameter. A pearl or another jewel, often only a bright glass pearl, is attached to the gold-ring. The *nath* is worn only on festive occasions; on ordinary days the Balahi women put a thorn through the hole in the nose to prevent it from growing together. Some wear a pin with a red or blue glass pearl in the nose. It is called *phulli* (flower) or *laung* (clove).

The Balahi women wear various kinds of ornaments in the ears, for instance: the *dodi* and *jhunka*, small rings in the upper and middle ear, the latter having a pendant in the shape of the marigold flower (*genda*). In the Holkar State it is called *bhauri*. Sometimes the pendant is larger and bell-like; such an ornament is called *tukri*.

Other ornaments for the ear are the *knyru* and the *nalai*, the one attached to the ear-lobe is smaller and has the form of a flower, the other is almost an inch in diameter and has the shape of a shield.

The ears of the Balahi women without any ornaments are no pleasant sight: the auricle is full of holes, sometimes torn; the lobe is largely extended. If it contains no ornament, a big round piece of wood or bamboo is driven through the hole in the lobe. The upper part of the auricle hangs down almost to the earhole, bent by the heavy ornament usually attached to its upper edge. The ears are often very dirty, because they cannot be cleaned properly, covered as they are with ornaments.

Balahi women have several ornaments to adorn their hair, for instance the *bindia* (*bindli*), two chains leading from the back of the neck over the ears to the forehead. In the centre where the two chains meet is the image of a cobra or an ornament that has the shape of a custard-apple (*bija*). Other hair-ornaments are the *lakri* (or *rakri*), bell-shaped, but smaller than the *bora* (or *buru*), a flat, quadrangular piece of silver, whose lower end is broader than the upper and carries tassels.

The neck of a Balahi female is adorned by the *takli*, a massive, snake-shaped silver-ring, or the *hasli*, a silver bar necklet, and a number of silver chains, called *sakrai* (or *batlu*) which hang down over the chest.

Married women wear also the *pot*, strings of glass pearls, sewn together in four or five rows on a piece of cloth, and loose strings of glass-pearls.

Around the neck is also worn the *bendhal*, a square or round piece of silver. A husband gives this ornament to his second wife after the death of the first. By wearing the *bendhal* (which represents the first wife) the second expresses the intention to follow faithfully the good example of her predecessor in serving her husband. When the woman puts on this *bendhal* for the first time, it is painted with the sacred *kuku*. Then also the woman's forehead is painted with *kuku*. On Rola tiki, the feast of Tili Sankrant (when the sun changes from one sign of the zodiac to the other), the women who wear a *bendhal* take a bath and wash their clothes. They also give the whole house as fresh coating of cow-dung. Then the women remove the *bendhal* from their neck, place it on a platform and worship it. Rice, *kuku*, and other ingredients are offered. Four or five girls are invited for a festive meal.

Children often wear a necklace of rupee or four-anna pieces; the coins are either held together by silver wire or are attached to a silver chain.

The finger rings of the Balahi women are: the *arsi mundi*, the *gol*, and the *hath sakra*. These rings are either pieces of silver wire, wound once or twice around the finger, or rings the ends of which are joined, or rings with small globes attached to the wire.

On the wrists, the Balahi women wear the *dal*, the *erya*, the *churi* or *khanrai*, and the *binjni*. These armlets are not always of silver, but usually of nickel or glass or lacquer. The glass rings (*bangli* or *baṭla*) are of red, green or yellow glass and thinner than the ivory coloured lacquer bangles which are about half an inch broad, but flat.

On the upper arms, above the elbow, are worn the *bhautia*, a heavy silver armlet, often in filigree, then the *satri ka bhautia*, the *dand ka kara*, and the *baju band* (of massive silver). Only one of these ornaments is worn at a time.

On their ankles the Balahi women wear the *kara*, a light, hollow smooth silver ring, below it the *torā* which has the form of a thick rope and is much heavier than the *kara*. Often they also wear the *kamin* (or *payera*), a thin and oval silver ring, worn like a spur down at the heels. The ankle ornaments are worn on both legs and often all three kinds at the same time.

Balahi women usually do not wear the *pinjan*, an anklet with tinkling bells (*ghungru*). Such anklets are only worn by dancers. As the clan goddess of the Balahis is believed to wear such anklets

and foot and arm rings of brass, the women of most Balahi clans are not allowed to wear them.

Toe rings are the *bela*, the *tichhia* and the *bichhia*. The latter has the shape of a scorpion (*bichhu*). The *bela* is simply a piece of silver wire wound around a toe, usually the big toe.

The silver and gold ornaments of the women are usually family property which can be sold or pawned in times of need. Balahis buy such ornaments not only to please their womenfolk, but also as a secure investment of money. When money is needed, these ornaments are pawned or sold at the current market price. It is much easier for a Balahi to get a loan if he can pawn some silver, and he may even have to pay less interest than if he can give no security. If the Balahi is forced to sell his silver ornaments, he receives only the price of the silver, no value is attached to the workmanship of the silver-smith.

Unlike aboriginal and other low-caste women of the district, Balahi women wear few tattoo marks. They usually have only a single point on the 'beauty-spot' between the eye-brows, one or three points on the chin and on the cheek bones. The outside of their wrists is often tattooed with eight dashes in the form of a rhomb. These marks are called *pomchi*. Their significance is unknown. The tattoo marks are made with a mixture of lamp black and *nim*-juice. The skin is pricked with a needle and the mixture rubbed into the wound. It causes a painful swelling which subsides after some time but leaves an indelible mark.

Balahi women are not averse to using certain kinds of cosmetics. Girls and young women often paint the so-called beauty-spot between the eye-brows with black or red paint; or they paste on it a small, round or star-shaped, piece of gold-paper. It is called *tikli*. They apply collyrium (*kajar*) or lamp-black around the eyes, which is supposed to make them appear large and beautiful. The lips are reddened with betel-juice. The teeth are made clean and sparkling with charcoal or *missi*, a mixture of myrobolans, cloves and cardamom, and other constituents. With advancing age the incisors, especially of the women, often become very large and protruding. But at that age most Balahi women are past caring for their beauty! — Girls and young women often paint the inner side of their palms, the finger and toe nails red with the juice of *muni*, a garden shrub. They also rub *kuku*-powder on their forehead, mixed with turmeric, borax, and the juice of lime.

## Chapter XXVII.

**Habitations and House-building****(1) The Balahi Village**

Most Hindu villages of the Nimar are dirty and unsanitary. Especially in the Malguzari districts where the villages in former times had a wall around them as a defence against the bands of robbers who at that time ravaged the country, the village quarters are very compact and the houses cling together like tinned sardines. There is little space for court-yards or gardens. The village lanes are often so narrow that no cart can pass through them, they are mere foot-paths along which runs the gutter water and into which is emptied every sort of muck, rubbish and excrements. Every square foot of the village area is hotly disputed. When the children grow up and get married, they want to have their own living quarters. If no plot is available for a new house, they have to build it on their parents' premises. Thus a site which scarcely leaves room for one decent house, is occupied by a number of families living in small huts or precariously built houses without privacy, without even enough breathing-space.

If living conditions are bad enough in the quarters of the high-caste people, they are worse in those of the low-castes and the out-caste Balahis, Chamars, and Sweepers. The houses are low, constructed of wood and clay, often cracked and bulging ominously, so that one has the feeling that they might topple down at any moment. The small court-yards are full of garbage and offal; the narrow, tortuous lanes through their quarters are filthy, slippery, full of animal and human excreta. Everywhere skinny cows and old bullocks, mangy dogs, and noisy children. The air is saturated with the odour of garlic, tobacco, of gutter water and excreta.

The village sites in the new settlements of the Ryotwari area in the east of the Nimar District are less congested, but they are scarcely any cleaner. Especially the Balahi quarters are as filthy as can be. These people have apparently not much sense for cleanliness and hygiene. I have often seen the Sweeper's pigs devouring human excreta in the village lanes and court-yards and then licking the cooking pots of the Balahis lying around before the houses! Scarcely anybody took notice of them or chased them away. One can daily see Balahi women washing their clothes in rivulets which pass near a village and into which is emptied all the filth and dirty water of the whole village. Or they bathe and wash their clothes so near to the open wells that most of the dirty water runs back into the same well from which they fetch their water for drinking and cooking. Anybody who has seen the Balahi villages must admit that

this description is no exaggeration. It is necessary to mention these unsavory facts for a better understanding of the Balahi mentality and a just appraisal of their living conditions.

## (2) House-building

The building of a new house and homestead is for a Balahi a matter of grave concern. For in his opinion the future welfare of his whole family depends on the faithful observance of all the rules and rites which ordinarily accompany the building of a new house. If the future guardian spirits of the new house are not venerated in the proper manner, if evil spirits are allowed to enter the house or to cast a spell on it, if the building is started on an unpropitious day, the people going to live in such a house are likely to come to harm. The Balahis therefore are careful to consult a Brahman (at least a Balahi Brahman) about the most auspicious day for beginning to build. The auspicious days of the month are generally the second, third, fifth, seventh, tenth, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, seventeenth, twentieth, twenty-fifth, twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth. Of these days the Brahman selects the day which according to the constellation of the stars is the most propitious day for starting a building. The ninth, fifteenth, and the twenty-fourth day of the month are considered unlucky days; consequently nobody begins any important work on such a day. In the month of Srawan (July) the eighth and the twenty-third day are also unlucky days.

After the Brahman has calculated the most auspicious day for the starting of the house-building, he must also indicate the hour of the day which is most propitious. Usually the time early in the morning, between 6 and 8 a. m., and in the evening between 4 and 6 p. m., is best suited for the occasion.

Before the Balahi begins to dig the holes for the corner-posts of his new house, he makes the offering of a coconut; after the holes for the corner-posts are dug, he stops work and waits for another auspicious day for a more solemn offering. On the day fixed upon, the man who intends to build a new house brings a big brass plate (*prat*) with a coconut, *kuku* powder, rice grains, *gur*, and a copper coin on it. If he is a wealthy man, he puts a silver coin on the plate. Also an earthen lamp with a burning wick in it is placed thereon. A *lota* full of water is also brought. Now the man pours water from the *lota* into the holes dug for the corner-posts of the new house; he breaks the coconut and throws pieces of it into all the holes, he also pours *kuku* powder and rice grains into each hole, and at last the coin. Then a man dips his thumb into the sacred *kuku* paste and paints the foreheads of all the men present, rubbing his thumb over their foreheads from the nose upwards. During the whole ceremony

the men keep their heads covered. After the last man received his blessing with *kuku*, a post is rammed at once into the hole in which the offerings were deposited, and the hole is filled with stones and earth. If the Balahi intends to build a brick-house, he digs first the foundations in which he deposits his offering. Then the men first build up that part of the foundation in which the offering has been laid.

No Balahi house is built with the main entrance towards the south, for in that direction lies the region of the dead. For the same reason no Balahi will sleep with his feet pointing to the south, for

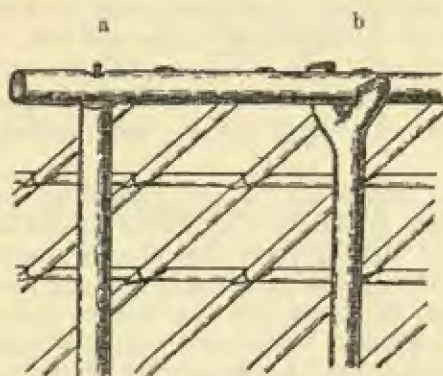


Fig. 3. Structure of a Balahi-house. a) pivot-joining, b) fork-joining.

the dead are buried in this way. If a house is built in the east-west direction, the main door is put in the northern wall; if the house has a north-south direction the main entrance is usually towards the east.

A house with walls of mud or of bamboo requires three rows of posts for supporting the roof. According to the size of the house, each row contains three or four posts, the centre-posts being higher and thicker. The posts are usually hewn of teak, or of the trunk of a Salai tree. The top of each post ends either in a fork, or in a pivot. The roof-tree is simply laid into the forks of the vertical posts, or a hole is hewn into the ends of the roof-tree and the pivots of the vertical posts driven through these holes.

For fixing the roof-tree, the Balahi awaits another auspicious day. Then an offering is made at one of the posts which are to carry the roof-tree. *Ghi* is poured on the post so that it flows down to the ground. After the roof-tree has been set, a coconut is offered; this is also done when the door-posts are put in. As soon as the roof beams

are set and the vertical posts properly fixed and connected, a man climbs the post at the south or west and ties to the top a mango twig, a coil of cotton thread, and a red rag, in a corner of which he ties a copper coin, and a *supari* nut. The whole arrangement is covered with a cloth which is only taken off when the whole building is finished. The offered articles remain on the roof-tree till they fall off by themselves or are eaten up by rats. This offering is made to the ancestors of the family who are requested to bless the new house.

In addition to the red cloth, white rags are tied to the roof tree at several spots to chase away the crows. For it is believed that one of the inmates of the house will die soon after the building has been finished, if crows are allowed to sit on the roof tree.

The roof tree is never set at day-time, but one or two hours before dawn, when everybody in the village is fast asleep. This is necessary in order to prevent anyone from casting his 'evil eye' on it.

After the roof beams are set and tied to the posts with bark ropes, wooden spars or bamboos are nailed or tied at both sides of the roof, from the higher centre row of roof-beams down to the lower side-rows. Then spars are set at a distance of one, or one and a half feet. Across the spars they put bamboo splits or a wicker-work of twigs and bamboo. Then, over a layer of large leaves of the teak or *salai* trees, the country tiles are laid, or else a cover of grass or *joari*-stalks. The country tiles are of clay, mixed with chopped straw and cow-dung, and are burned by the Kumars. The Balahis do not burn the tiles themselves. The country tiles are oblong, about a foot long, a little upturned at the edges. They are laid in rows beginning from the lower end of the roof, one tile half covering the other. Over the first layer of tiles is laid a second layer, but so that the turned-up edges of the first layer are covered by the second, the turned-down edges of which rest on the middle of the first layer. In this way a water-proof roof is accomplished. Better than flat tiles (*kawelu*) are half-round ones (*nali*). They too are laid in a double layer.

Wealthy Balahis often prefer to have a roof of corrugated iron sheets. Though these sheets make a house intolerably hot in summer, they are water-proof and need no repairs for years, while a roof of country-tiles must be repaired every year. In the course of the year many tiles are broken by monkeys or cats, or blown off by a storm. Sometimes they are destroyed by a hail-storm. The iron-sheets are also a good investment. In times of need the sheets are taken off and sold or pawned. During the war many Balahis sold their iron sheets with much profit.

After the roof is finished, the Balahi begins the building of the walls which sometimes are made of brick, more often of mud. The clay for it is mixed with water and chopped straw and tempered properly by stamping it with bare feet. Then big lumps are made and set up in the spaces between the wooden posts. Such walls keep

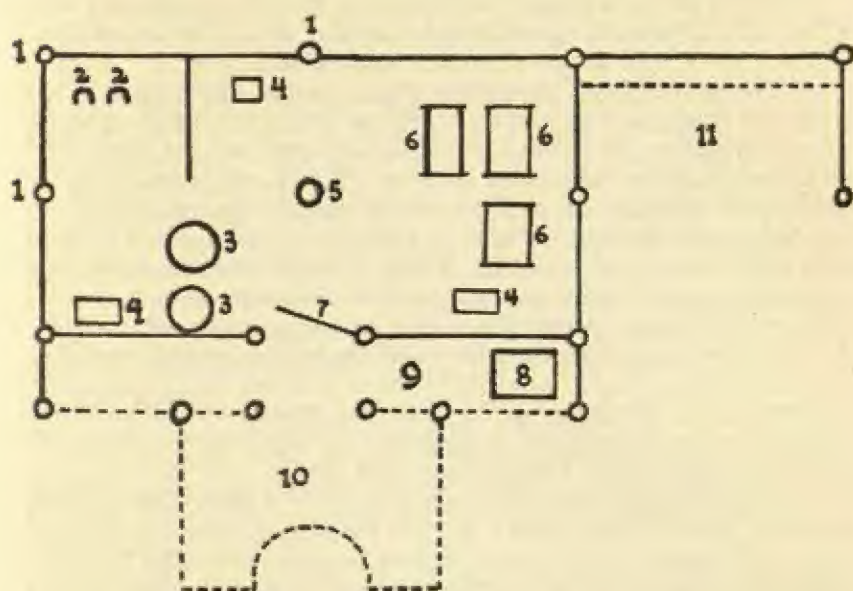


Fig. 4. Plan of a Balahi-house.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Wooden pillars   | 7) door                                     |
| 2) Fire-side: <i>chulha</i>                                   | 8) waterstand: <i>ghundi</i> or <i>gara</i> |
| 3) <i>kothi</i> : grain bins                                  | 9) veranda                                  |
| 4) <i>bethi</i> : box   | 10) <i>angan</i>                            |
| 5) middle pillars: <i>komba</i>                               | 11) cattle shed                             |
| 6) bed-steeds: <i>khat</i> , <i>palang</i> (big <i>khat</i> ) |   |

the house cool and well protected, but they are easily corroded by white-ants and rats. No windows are set in the walls. Light and air enter the house only by the doors, in the front and at the back of the house, and through cracks and holes between walls and roof. The smoke from the kitchen fire leaves by the same route. Often instead of mud walls simple bamboo mats are fixed between the corner posts. Or a kind of wickerwork is erected of cotton or *tuar* stalks. These

walls are covered with a layer of clay and of cow-dung, and often painted with white clay. This is the work of the women of the family who often display their artistic talents by painting quaint geometrical designs or the figures of men and animals on the house walls.

If the building is a simple hut, no veranda is erected. The roof usually hangs a few feet over the front and back walls of the house to protect them against the rain and the sun. But a large well-built house has at least a front veranda, a part of which is protected against the rain by a low wall or a bamboo mat.

The main entrance of a Balahi house is usually placed in the middle of the front side. It can be closed by a door, either of wood, or a bamboo mat, or a sheet of corrugated iron. In the back wall, opposite to the front entrance, there is usually another door which leads into a small garden or court-yard if there is space for such.

When the building is finished, the floor is levelled and covered with a layer of gravel (*murum*). Earth is spread over the gravel and the ground is well beaten into a firm floor. Then the floor is covered with several layers of cow-dung. The cow-dung, collected fresh for this purpose is mixed with water and vigorously worked with feet and hands into a kind of semi-liquid paste with just the proper degree of consistency. Kneeling on the floor the women of the house lay down a coating of the paste, spreading it out nicely and making sure that the whole surface becomes even and glossy.

Before the main entrance there is usually a somewhat elevated platform, often covered with a roof of grass and leaves. It is about four to six square yards in size and enclosed on two sides by a low mud wall, about a foot high. This place, called *angan*, gets a coating with fresh manure each time the house is cleaned and covered with the same coating. Here the visitors are received, the men sit and chat, the women gossip and do their house-work, cleaning their grain or drying their red pepper or foodstuff. Here many religious and social ceremonies are performed for which there would be no room inside the house.

Neither this place nor the inner rooms of the house should be entered with shoes on. Not only, because Balahi etiquette demands that one takes off one's shoes before entering a house, especially the portion near the fire-place, but also because muddy shoes or boots would make short work of the mud floor, while bare feet make it even more smooth and even.

The court-yard of a Balahi house is either enclosed by a mud wall, or by a bamboo fence set with thorns or branches. The doorway in the fence in front of the house is shut at night by a large beam through which stout vertical poles are driven. This door is called *phatak*. Inside this court-yard there are one or more cattle-sheds,

according to the wealth of the Balahi owner. Sometimes the cattle shed is attached to the house, but more often it is a special building, a little apart from the main house. Very poor Balahis have often neither court-yard nor cattle shed. If space is easily available in a village, the Balahis have also a back-yard with a small garden attached where they grow some vegetables, maize, and a little tobacco. Here the soil is usually dug up with a hoe and the seed laid in holes made with a stick. After the rainy season this garden plot is allowed to grow wild and is soon covered with weeds and shrubs.

If the family is small, a single room is sufficient for all. Only a portion of the house is partitioned off for the kitchen, separated from the main room either by a bamboo mat (*tatta*) or by one or two grain bins (*kothi*). If the family is large, and married sons with children are living together with their parents, a portion of the house is given to them, or an additional room is attached. Some wealthy Balahis, but they are few, have even a two-storeyed house. Often the upper storey is only used for the storage of grain and other things, or a married son is allowed to sleep there for the night in privacy with his wife. But the main family stays downstairs.

### (3) Household Articles

In the living room the most conspicuous object is the grain-bin (*kothi*). There are usually several *kothis* in the house and on the veranda, one or two big ones and a number of smaller ones, for the different kinds of grain.

The grain-bin is made of a mixture of black clay and the chaff of wheat. The black clay and the chaff are well mixed and kneaded first with the feet and then with the hands. Then on the clean floor a round layer is formed about two inches thick and about three or four feet in diameter. It forms the bottom of the bin. Then the side walls are built up about two inches thick and smoothed with the palms of the hand. The grain-bin has the shape of a huge lantern-glass bulging slightly in the middle, at the brim no broader than at the bottom. Even the bigger grain-bins are usually not higher than seven feet. The side-walls are often made in two or three partitions and placed one on top of the other. If a grain-bin has to be shifted to another place, it can thus be taken to pieces and removed in parts.

Before use, both the inside and the outside of the bin are given a coating of cow-dung. After the dung has dried, the bottom and the side-walls are laid out with *nim* leaves. These leaves are mixed also into the grain. Before the bin, full of grain, is covered with a lid of the same material as the walls, a layer of *nim* leaves is heaped on top of the grain. The grain is removed from the bin through a hole

near the bottom. After use the hole is filled with a rag, to prevent rats from getting at the grain.

The grain can be kept in such bins for a whole year. After the monsoon it is usually taken out and dried in the sun. The bin is thoroughly cleaned and smeared with cow-dung, then the bottom again covered with *nim*-leaves, and the grain put back for storage. The *nim*-leaves prevent any damage from insects and bugs; but there is no such protection against rats and other vermin. They dig holes into the mud walls and do a lot of damage. Though the *kothi* may be placed on a platform covered with thorns, the rats nearly always find a way in.

That is why some Balahis prefer bins made of bamboo wicker-work. Aboriginal Korkus and Basors (a caste of basket makers) make such bins. They are called *kanpa*. Before use the *kanpa* receives three times a coating of cow-dung. The grain in the *kanpa* is less exposed to rats, but it is more easily damaged by insects and bugs which are scarcely ever found in the *kothi*.

Every morning the grain for the whole day is removed from the grain-bin and ground into flour in the grinding mill (*chakki*). Before grinding *joari* and wheat grains are first cleaned from the husk and gravel with the *supra*, the winnowing fan, which is made of reeds and bought ready-made from the Basors. The *supra* is oblong in shape and has a low wall around three sides. The winnowing is always done by women, usually immediately before grinding the grain to flour.

The hand-mill is placed either on the veranda or in a corner of the inner room. The grinding mill (*chakki*) consists of two stones. The lower stone which is firmly built into the floor is surrounded with a low wall of clay and cow-dung. The flour which is driven out of the mill through the turning of the upper stone is caught in the channel thus formed between mill-stone and surrounding wall. The upper stone has a wooden handle by means of which the stone is turned by the grinding woman. It is set near the outer edge of the stone. In the centre of the upper stone there is a hole through which passes the axle (an iron pin) firmly set in the lower stone. The grinding woman turns the upper stone with one hand from right to left, while with the other hand she feeds the mill by pouring the grain through the hole in the centre. The ordinary grinding mill of the Balahis is worked by one woman, but there are bigger mills which require the services of two. The woman who grinds the flour is sitting on the ground, one of her legs is usually stretched out at the side of the mill, while the other leg is tucked in under her thigh with the shin resting against the stone. The handle is turned either with the right or the left hand.

The usual time for grinding is the early morning, one or two hours before day-break. Often the tiresome and monotonous work of turning the handle for hours is accompanied by endless songs, ballads telling of the virtues of a goddess or a great lady. Some Balahi women know quite a number of these songs which are sung in simple but rather pleasant tunes.

While grains like *joari* or wheat are husked on the threshing-floor, other grains must be husked by the women with a pestle. The mortar (*okhri*) is a hole in a stump of wood let into the ground either in the house or on the verandah, while the pestle (*musar*) is a heavy log of *khair* wood (*Acacia catechu*). It is from four to five feet long, heavy at the bottom, and slightly thinner at the upper end. To prevent its splitting, the bottom end is held together by an iron ring. The middle of the pestle is notched to allow the pounding woman a firmer grip. When pounding grain, the woman sits on the floor with the hole between her knees.

In the corner farthest from the door is the fire-place. The horse-shoe shaped hearths are of baked clay with an iron grate or simply two iron sticks across their mouths to carry pot or pan. The hearth is called *chulha*. The place near the hearth-fire is held sacred and no one is allowed to step near it with his shoes on. Strangers, especially if they are of lower caste are not permitted to approach the fire-place.

There is usually a fire smouldering under the ashes, even at a time when no cooking is done. Only when the whole family goes on a journey, is the hearth-fire extinguished. But should it happen that the fire goes out, a Balahi simply asks his neighbour for a fire-brand. To light a pipe when they rest from work in the fields or jungle, the Balahis take a smouldering dung-cake along from the house. Other Balahis carry a so-called *chakmak*, a piece of steel attached by a small chain to a gourd containing wool from the unripe fruit of a *semal* tree (*Bombax malabaricum* — Silk-cotton tree). The dry wool easily catches fire from the spark produced by striking the steel against a piece of quartz. Only a few Balahis carry matches in their pockets.

The most primitive method of kindling a fire which is applied only in cases of emergency is by means of either the fire drill or the fire-saw. The Balahis use bamboo sticks if they make fire in such a manner.

Fuel for the cooking is stacked in the court-yard, or during the monsoon on the verandah. Where fire-wood is scarce, the Balahis burn dung-cakes dried in the sun. Dry dung gives more heat than wood. To stir up the fire, a pair of small tongs or pokers is used.

Near the fire-side there is also the slab for grinding spices (*sil*) and the roller (*loha*), both of stone.

The cooking pots (*handi*) are usually of iron, though earthen pots may also be used. There are pots of various sizes in every house, all black with soot on the outside.

The flat *joari* cakes are baked on a round shallow iron pan which is called *tawa*.

Except for a few big spoons or a fork, there are no other cooking utensils in the house.

The water, for drinking and cooking purposes, is kept in large, round-shaped brass vessels with a brim. There are always several of these vessels in a fairly wealthy Balahi house, only very poor Balahis fetch their water in earthen pots. These large brass vessels (*gundi*) are always kept clean, even by the laziest Balahi woman. A woman who goes to fetch water from the well takes along a bucket and a rope with which to draw water. The first bucket drawn is for the cleaning of the *gundi*. The brass vessel is well rubbed with mud and cleaned with water till it shines. Only then is the vessel filled with clean water. A strong woman can carry two *gundi*, one on top of the other, filled to the brim with water. The fetching of water usually takes a considerable time, for the well is the place where morning and evening all the Balahi women of the village meet for a chat. Here the gossip of the day is exchanged and every event in the village discussed. Then the women assist each other in lifting the *gundi* on to their heads and in small groups, one behind the other, "swaying at the hips with the superb carriage of queens", they walk home and place the vessels upon a wooden stand in the shade, usually outside the house, near or under the veranda.

The plates on which the meal is served are always of brass. If such plates (*prat*) are not available, the people eat off leaf plates. The Balahis drink from brass cups of which there are several in every house, or from the *lota*, a pear-shaped brass-vessel.

The *lota* is also taken along when the Balahi goes to relieve himself. He cleans himself with his left hand which therefore should never touch food at a meal.

In every house are also found one or more bedsteads. A bedstead has an oblong wooden frame with four legs sometimes carved and painted. A large bedstead of better make is called *palang*; it is about six feet long and four feet broad with legs about two feet high, while the common bedstead, called *khat* or *charpai*, is smaller and much lower. Since most Balahis sleep all curled up, they do not need large beds. Some Balahis use beds which are suspended from the roof-beams. The net-work on the bedstead is usually of *amari* fibres, sometimes of the fibres of the coconut palm (coir), or plaited

from split bamboo sticks. Wealthy Balahis sleep on a *palang* covered with a netting of broad cotton tapes which is more comfortable but also much more expensive than a string-netting.

The Balahis, like other Hindus of the district, do not undress for the night, they sleep in their clothes. The men and boys, though, usually take off their shirts when they go to bed, while the women sometimes loosen the bodice. Usually they cover themselves with a rough cotton sheet, called *chaddar*. On cold nights the Balahis use a stuffed quilt for a cover. The stuffing of the quilt consists either of cotton or old rags. Some Balahis have mattresses made of old clothes and rags sewn together, they are called *bothri*. Blankets are called *kammal*. In the cold season the Balahis place a earthen basin containing smouldering coal under the bed, or sleep on the floor, where it is easier to keep warm than on the bedstead where the cold air reaches the body from underneath.

Small children sleep either with their parents on the same bed, or in a swing, formed by a cloth rag tied between two ropes hanging from the roof-tree. Husband and wife use separate bedsteads when there are children. But until the birth of their first child they should sleep together on the same bed.

In the house, in the evening and at night, the Balahis usually require no other light than the gleam of the hearth-fire. If more light is needed for a short while, they light a chip of wood. During the night they burn a *diya* or *dewani*, that is a small earthen bowl filled with oil in which a cotton wick is soaked. Nowadays they often use a small tin-pot filled with kerosene oil. The cotton wick is held in a short narrow pipe in the centre of the lid, and burns without a chimney. A few Balahis have lanterns.

The Balahis, like most other people, feel uneasy in a completely dark room and like to have some sort of light however dim. Also when making a journey in a dark night they always take a light along. The reason for this precaution is a very practical one: in a dark room they are afraid of treading on a snake or scorpion, and when on a journey, of being attacked by wild animals. Another reason is that they are afraid of evil spirits whose evil spells seem to be less effective if there is a gleam of light.

Balahis still consider tables and chairs superfluous furniture for which they have no use. Nor do they have any cupboards and chests, though in every house one finds one or two lockable iron trunks where more valuable articles such as jewels, clothes, documents, money, etc. are put by.

From the roof beams, all black with the soot of years, are suspended various earthen pots containing *ghí*, oil, milk, etc. There they are out of the reach of prowling animals, dogs, cats, and rats.

Red clothes and other articles are hung over suspended bamboo poles, while a great miscellany of articles and utensils are kept on shelves and recesses and holes in the walls. Hatchet-heads, pots and baskets, of various sizes and forms, ropes, bullock-bells, dried herbs and seeds, in short, everything that could be of any use some day is carefully put by and stored away in some unexpected corner, on the flattened roof-beams, in the house or on the verandah. In a Balahi household nothing which might eventually prove useful is thrown away.

But all told, the contents of even a fairly wealthy Balahi house are relatively few and of the cheapest material. With the exception of the silver ornaments and the brass vessels, the whole furniture of a Balahi house would if sold fetch only a few rupees.

## Chapter XXVIII.

### What the Balahis Eat and Drink

#### (1) Kinds of Food

##### *Joari*

The staple food of the Balahis consists of bread prepared of *joari* flour (millet). The flour is mixed with water and salt and the dough kneaded well by hand. Then a lump as big as a fist is taken and worked into a flat cake, about as big as a soup-plate; well kneaded *joari* cakes are thin and consist of several layers, but usually the Balahi women do not take the trouble of rolling out the dough more than three or four times. The usual *joari* cakes are about half a finger thick. They are baked over the fire on an iron pan (*tawa*) which is sometimes covered with a thin layer of oil or *ghi*. As soon as the cake turns brown it is turned over and again put upon the fire. These *joari* cakes are eaten either dry, or with a dish of vegetables, mostly *dal*, or with *mirchi* (red pepper) for better digestion.

In times of plenty the *joari* cakes are broken into crumbs, roasted in *ghi* and eaten with *gur* and sugar.

##### Wheat

Wheat cakes are prepared in the same manner as *joari*-bread. As wheat is more expensive than *joari*, it is eaten only by wealthy Balahis or occasionally by farmers who grow their own.

An expensive dish is *sirapuri*: Roasted wheat cakes are broken into crumbs and then roasted again with the same amount of *ghi*. For one pound of wheat-flour one pound of *ghi* is required. However, if so much *ghi* is not available, they have to content themselves with less.

## Rice

Boiled rice which is eaten with *dal* and *joari* bread, is a welcome change in the diet of a Balahi. But it is eaten only two or three times a week, for the Balahis say that rice just fills the stomach, but does not give any strength. In a caste dinner when many people are entertained, rice forms generally one of the main dishes of the meal.

The Balahis know also how to prepare a kind of rice porridge which they call *khir*. The rice is boiled in water, and milk is added when it is on the boil. No salt is added, but sugar or molasse may be mixed into the rice.

## Dal

As a side-dish, along with *joari*, wheat cakes or rice, *dal* is eaten. *Dal* is the pulse of *tuar*, *masur* or *urad* which is pulped and well boiled for about an hour or more. When it is soft, a generous quantity of salt, *mirchi* (Indian red pepper) and turmeric is added, to give it the right flavour.

Pieces of the *chapatis* (bread cakes) are broken off, dipped into the hot broth and eaten.

Maize (*Zea mays*)

It is grown in the gardens near the house, and sown right at the beginning of the rainy season. The green cobs of maize are eaten as a vegetable. When half-ripe or ripe, the heads (*bhutta*) are broken off and eaten either raw or dried. The stalks are fed to bullocks or water buffaloes. The Balahis do not grind maize grain to flour, though it is sometimes pounded to a coarse grit or boiled with vegetables into a gruel. Sometimes the grain is dried and eaten as *lahi* or *dhani*.

## Vegetables

To *joari* cakes and *dal* the Balahis often add a dish of vegetable. Though they rarely eat *ringna* or *baingan* (egg-fruit — *Solanum melangena*), *bhindi* (lady's finger), *matar* (pea — *Pisum arvense*), or vegetables which are common at the table of better situated town's people, they have almost always onions, or *kakri* (cucumber) or *mula* (radish), or *bhura* (pumpkin).

They also eat as vegetables the young shoots of *chareta*, the young green leaves of gram, leaves of the *pipal* tree, the fruits of *temru* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), the large scarlet flower of *semal* (*Bombax malabaricum*), the corolla of *mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*), either green or dried in a mess of *joari* or rice. *Mahua* is also ground to flour and used as a substitute for *joari* or wheat flour in times of scarcity.

### Gur

Unrefined sugar (*gur*) is taken by the Balahis to sweeten the tea which many take now in the morning before going to work. *Gur* is an indispensable dish at a caste dinner when it is served in small crumbs after rice and *dal*.

### Oil and *ghi*

Sometimes the *joari* or wheat cakes are baked in sweet oil or *ghi*. The latter is clarified butter, while the oil is either of *tilli* or ground nuts (*mumphalli*).

*Ghi* is made from the butter of water-buffalo milk, since cow's milk is too rare. The butter is prepared in the following way: The vessel in which the *dahi* (curd) is kept, is (when there is a sufficient quantity) placed at the foot of a post. Then a churning staff is put into the *dahi*, its top being kept in position by a loop of cord running round the post and the stick. The churning staff is generally of bamboo, some 5 feet long, split at the lower end into four parts which are kept apart by fixed cross-pieces. Another long cord is taken three or four times round the churning staff and by alternately pulling this cord at each end, the staff is made to revolve. Butter may be churned by a man or by a woman.

### Milk

For Balahis milk is a luxury. If a Balahi is the happy owner of a water buffalo, he does not drink the milk, but makes *ghi*. The rest of the churned milk is given to the calf, or the members of the family drink it together with red pepper.

The Balahis do not drink fresh milk, they believe that they would get sore eyes if they did so.

Cow's milk is very rare, the country cows give little more than two pints a day. Cow's milk is given to babies whose mother has died or who is unable to feed her child. Sometimes the Balahis buy a goat in order to feed a baby.

Balahis who have acquired the habit of drinking tea, always take it with milk, usually buffalo milk.

### Sweets

The Balahis are very fond of sweets, which they prepare themselves or buy in the bazar from the *halwai* (confectioner).

The most popular kind of sweet is *laddu*: a ball of sugar and wheat flour. A *laddu* banquet is the best meal which a Balahi can imagine. Some Balahis are able to eat eight *laddu* at one meal.

*Halwa* is a dry combination of flour, sugar and *ghi*, in which the flour dominates.

Besides many other varieties of sweets which are prepared by the confectioners, the Balahis know how to prepare a sweet cake which is called *mungpat*. It is prepared of ground-nuts and *gur*. The nuts (in Nimari: *sayangli*) are husked, *gur* is warmed over the fire, a few drops of water are poured into the *gur* to make it fluid, and then the nuts are mixed with the *gur*; when cooled down, the cake becomes hard. This cake can be kept a long time in store.

Instead of ground-nuts, *tilli* may be mixed with *gur* in the same manner. This cake is even better than *mungpat*.

### Spices

The Balahis are used to heavily spiced meals. *Dal* and other vegetables are not eaten without a large quantity of spices. The spices in daily use are: salt, and *mirchi* (red pepper — *Capsicum frutescens*). Less often they use black pepper (*kali mirchi*). Some Balahis take half a handful of *mirchi* at every meal or eat it without any other dish but curds.

Other popular spices are: *hing* (*Ferula narthe asafoetida*), *long* or *laung* (cloves: *Eugenia cryophyllaea*), *dhanya* (coriander: *Coriandrum sativum* Linn.), *jira* (cummin), *haldi* (turmeric: *Curcuma longa*), *dalchini* (cinnamon), also *adrak* (ginger) and *ilaichi* (cardamom), *lassun* (garlic: *Allium sativum*), and others.

### Meat

The Balahis are not fastidious about their food. They can eat almost anything, no matter how rotten and spoiled it may be. Only in regard to meat do they make exceptions. They do not eat the meat of certain animals, for instance horses, camels, dogs, jackals, cats, rats, domesticated pigs, crows and other small birds. Dead horses, camels, dogs and cats are unclean and must not even be touched. A jackal is almost a dog, therefore it comes under the same category. Domesticated pigs are raised by sweepers, and are fed largely on garbage and refuse. Therefore pig's meat is taboo. But that is perhaps not the main reason for not eating it: the Balahi abstains from pig's meat because the higher castes do not eat it. They are very fond of the meat of the wild pig, which is also eaten by Rajputs and other high castes. Crows stand in some relation to their forefathers, therefore they are sacred. The meat of parrots is not eaten because parrots "can sometimes talk and are therefore similar to human beings". Camels and monkeys can be killed, but their meat may not be eaten. The meat of pigeons may be eaten, but the head and neck must first be removed — both are unclean.

Cattle cannot be killed, but the meat of dead cattle may be eaten, whether the animal has been killed or has died a natural death. Some

Balahi clans do not eat goat's meat, except in the sacrificial banquet, but no such taboo applies to beef. It is true, some villages, even whole sub-groups, have denounced the custom of eating beef which is so objectionable in the eyes of the Hindus. But in most of the Balahi houses of the Nimar beef is a cheap and nourishing addition to their meagre diet.

In many Balahi villages it is a veritable feast day when a bullock or a cow dies. As soon as the *kotwal* has dragged the body outside the village and has skinned it, his caste fellows come with baskets and pots and cut off big lumps, till nothing but a skeleton remains. Dogs and vultures wait impatiently till the Balahis have taken their share and then join in the spoil.

In the evening and on the next day the Balahis will have a heavy dinner. It is astounding how much meat a Balahi can eat at one meal. A man can easily finish two pounds of meat at one sitting, with rice and plenty of *mirchi* as well.

Whatever remains over is cut in long thin stripes and hung on strings from the roof beams of the house. There the meat is dried, then it is kept in a box or in a pot so that no rats may get at it. This kind of meat is called *wakri*. Whenever the Balahi feels an appetite for meat, a certain amount of this *wakri* is taken from the box, soaked in water for a day, then boiled and eaten. Meat poisoning is very rare though beef preserved in this way often smells badly and is green and full of vermin. It seems that frequent consumption of rotting meat has made the Balahis immune from meat poisoning.

Although the eating of beef and carrion is one of the main reasons why the Balahis in the Nimar are treated as untouchables, few Balahis can withstand the temptation to eat it. Their craving for meat is too strong. Since goat's meat and chicken are too expensive, they always return to beef. In many caste meetings the eating of beef has been denounced as degrading and sinful, but the Balahis of the Nimar have ever again returned to this custom<sup>99</sup>).

The Balahis, of course, eat also the meat of the water-buffalo. They may kill a male buffalo, but not a buffalo cow.

### *Jhutha*

Another speciality of the Balahi diet to which the high caste Hindus object with equal revulsion as to the eating of beef, is *jhutha*. When the members of a high-caste community hold a banquet, the Balahis wait patiently till it is finished. Then they collect the leavings of the meal, that is: the leaf-plates and all food that is left

<sup>99</sup>) In 1947 the Balahis again renounced the eating of beef, for how long is still to be seen.

on them and put it into a huge pot which they carry to their quarters. There all Balahis of the village who want a share come together and the food is distributed among them. The mixture of rice, *dal*, and *joari* bread, or whatever was left on the plates, is warmed over the fire and eaten in the privacy of the home.

This custom of eating *jhutha* is regarded as very degrading in the eyes of the respectable Hindu castes, but it is still very common among the Balahis. Though many Balahis nowadays feel ashamed of it and usually pretend that they take the leavings of the meal not for their own consumption, but to feed their cattle, it is an open secret that most of them eat it themselves.

In some villages however the Balahis decided not to touch *jhutha*, and in all villages there are certain families who refuse to eat it, but the majority of the Nimar Balahis still uphold this custom of their forefathers. In certain villages their high-caste masters and land-lords even force them to eat carrion and *jhutha*, as a means of "keeping them in their place" and suppressing all ideas of social advance.

### Fruits

The greater part of the year fruit is hardly to be seen on the table of a Balahi; it is a luxury which he can ill afford, except in the mango season and during the time when the jungle fruits ripen. But quite a number of Balahis own mango trees (*Mangifera indica*). It is strange, however, that frequently their trees stand in fields which do not belong to them. The Balahis usually claim that formerly the fields also were their property, but were wrenched from their hands by superior high-caste farmers and money-lenders. While the owners of the fields had thus for various reasons sold the land, they however retained the ownership of the fruit-trees which their forefathers had planted. Sometimes also a kind land-lord allowed his tenants or field servants to plant such trees in his own field and to pick the fruits<sup>91</sup>). Such fruit-trees are handed down from generation to generation. The Balahis cling to their property with great tenacity, in spite of all the difficulties which frequently arise from the fact that the trees grow in fields which do not belong to them.

The field-owners naturally look askance at such trees growing on their property, the more so because they greatly reduce the value

<sup>91</sup>) A strange ceremony is performed when a young mango tree bears its first fruits. The planter is considered 'father' of the tree and must perform its 'wedding' before he may eat of the fruits. The tree is 'married' to the figure of a man carved in wood and put up near the mango tree. The owner of the tree gives a wedding banquet to which he invites his caste fellows in the village.

of a field, since nothing grows in the dense shade which these trees throw. Consequently the field-owners either try to buy such trees from their owners, while the Balahis invariably refuse to sell them, or else seek to destroy them by secretly cutting the roots or by pouring acid on them. Since the destruction of a fruit tree is forbidden by law, the indignant owners promptly denounce such practices at court which, of course, results in endless quarrels and law suits.

When the mango fruits ripen, in May, they are picked as soon as their green colour changes into a yellowish red. After being picked, the fruits are stored in dry grass for a number of days till they have the right flavour. Then they are sold, either by the owners themselves in the market, or wholesale to hawkers. At the sale of mangoes on the market a peculiar manner of counting is employed which I came across only on this occasion: If one asks for a hundred mangoes, the fruit-seller takes 26 times six mangoes (three in each hand) from his basket and sells them for a hundred. This is called *ek saikra*. (On other occasions the Balahis, when counting 100, count 20 times 5. When they count money, they count by fours: 13 annas is 3 times four plus one; 17 rupees is 4 times four rupees plus one. Additions and subtractions, even multiplications are made with the help of the fingers of both hands. When the Balahis count with the help of their hands, they begin counting by touching with the thumb the little finger of the right hand. At '2' they touch the ring-finger, at '3' the middle-finger, at '4' the index-finger, and at '5' they spread all the fingers of one hand. Then they continue with the fingers of the other hand. This counting by fives is called *panchaur*).

The mango season coincides with the time when the Balahis make their social calls. The happy owners of mango trees who can afford it invite their friends and relatives to a so-called *amba khana* — mango dinner. These gladly accept such an invitation which, under the pretext of meeting good friends, gives them an opportunity to feast at a delicious meal.

The mango dinner is prepared in the following manner: The juice of the fruits is squeezed out by hand and poured into a pot. Then the kernels and skins of the squeezed fruits are thrown into another pot about half-full of water. There the kernels and skins are once more squeezed out and washed. This water then is poured into the pot which contains the juice of the mango fruits. *Gur* is added and the mixture well stirred. This is the famous *amba ras* (mango juice). It is eaten with a dish of rice, and considered a highly delicious meal.

When the Balahis eat single fruits, they squeeze the juice of the fruit into the hollow of their right hand and drink it.

Besides mangoes, the Balahis like other fruits also. Boys are very fond of the fruits of the tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica* — *imli*). From eating the mealy fruits they often get hoarse and start coughing. Lemons are used in almost every offering, and moreover are not seldom taken as pickle. Coconuts, of course, are never absent from an offering, but they are eaten also on other occasions. Guavas too (*jam-phal*, *Psidium guyava*) are usually so cheap in their season that occasionally even Balahis can afford them and likewise melons (*kharbuj* and *tarbuj*), while bananas, grapes, pomegranates, dates, *papaya*, etc. are generally much too expensive for them. Without being reproached with extravagance only the sick may ask for such fruits.

The *jamun* tree (*Eugenia jambolana*) comes into fruit in the beginning of the monsoon. Its plum-like fruits are sweet when picked in sun-shine after a heavy rain. The fruits are much appreciated by the Balahis, and are considered to be a cure for spleen.

The *mahua* tree (*Bassia latifolia Roxbergiensis*) is of great value to the poor Balahis. The corolla of its flowers falls at the commencement of the hot season, before the new leaves come out. These flowers are gathered by women and children and dried. When dry, they are beaten with a stick to remove the stamens. The dried corollas of the *mahua* are for many Balahis their daily food when the *joari* gives out towards the end of the hot season. The *mahua* flowers are soaked in water and roasted, after that they are pounded to flour. Boiled, roasted or parched they are eaten in huge quantities either alone or mixed with other food stuffs — for their nutritive value is rather low. In times of plenty the *mahua* flowers are fed to the bullocks in the rainy season, for they are said to be heating and thus prevent a cold which cattle frequently contract when exposed to the rain.

The fruit of the *achar* tree (*Buchanania latifolia*) is also eaten; the seed kernels, called *chironji*, are considered as particularly delicious.

The *tendu* tree (*Diospyros tomentosa*) produces a sweet fruit of which the Balahis are very fond.

The *gular* tree (*Ficus glomerata*) yields a peach coloured fruit which the children like.

## (2) Stimulants and Narcotics

### Opium

Opium (*aphim*) addicts are rare among the Balahis, though they occur at times. But only few Balahis can afford to buy opium regularly.

### Hemp

Hemp is taken in the forms of *ganja* and of *bhāṅg*. *Ganja* is the agglutinated female flowering tops and their resinous exudations. It is smoked. *Bhāṅg*, the mature leaves of hemp, is either made into an intoxicating beverage or taken in the form of a sweet-meat called *majun*.

As an intoxicant *bhāṅg* is much weaker than *ganja* and therefore less injurious in its effects.

Hemp in the forms of *bhāṅg* and *ganja* is quite popular among the Balahis, especially among their *barwas* and magicians who take it to get into the right mood for their exorcisms and magic performances. Taken in small quantities it seems to have no permanently ill effects on mind or body. Heavy hemp-smokers usually look thin and emaciated, and have little energy, but they also show a certain degree of immunity against disease. However, once they get sick, they are difficult to cure as medicines have little effect on their system.

The effect of hemp-smoking is drowsiness. To the hemp-addict the outer world appears to be far away and foggy; everything looks small and unimportant; the hearing too is affected. He feels himself beyond the reach of earthly troubles and withdrawn into a strange world of peace and happiness.

### Tobacco

Tobacco is chewed and smoked. Tobacco for chewing is kept in a round tin box about four inches long with two partitions: one of which contains tobacco, the other slaked lime. When a Balahi wants to take a quid, he takes as much tobacco as he can hold between thumb and fore-finger, and a pinch of lime. Rubbing the mixture with the thumb of his right hand in the hollow of his left, he forms a small ball which he sticks in the mouth between the teeth and the lower lip. Tobacco is chewed by men and women alike.

Only men however smoke it. The earthen pipe (*chilam*) is about four inches long and of conical shape. Its lower, narrower end is blocked with a small stone, then it is filled with tobacco to the brim and a glowing coal is put on top. The smoker wraps a wet rag around the lower end, takes the pipe in the hollow of his left hand while the right clasps the lower end covered by the wet rag. The smoke is drawn through the opening between thumb and fore-finger. Taking small puffs, the nikotin remains in the wet rag, while the smoke enters the mouth purified and cooled. The pipe, untouched by the lips of the smoker, is passed on to the next man who smokes it in the same manner.

A pipe is smoked when no urgent work is at hand, or during a pause, or at home, either alone or in the company of friends, or in a *panch* meeting. It is against Balahi etiquette to smoke before a person of a higher social status unless that person also smokes. No member of a higher caste will smoke with a Balahi, using the same *chilam*, and no Balahi will smoke with a member of an inferior caste. Smoking a pipe together is a sign of caste-fellowship.

Nowadays Balahis occasionally smoke cigarettes, the so-called *biris*. Usually they hold a cigarette between the teeth, but if they want to pass it on to another person, they hold it between the fore and middle fingers and suck the smoke through the hole between thumb and fore-finger.

Balahis generally avoid coming in touch with the lips of another person. Nor do they kiss one another, excepting small children whom they kiss on the cheek. No Balahi will drain the glass of water or liquor from which another person has taken a sip. He will pour the rest away and fill the glass anew. If several persons have to drink from one glass, they usually do not put the mouth to the brim of the glass, but pour the fluid into the mouth holding the glass at some distance, or they first pour it from the glass into the hollow of the hand and then drink from the hand. But Balahis do not mind drinking water from a river or pond which is also used for bathing or washing clothes.

### Liquor

Like other low castes and the aboriginal tribes of the Nimar, the Balahis are fond of intoxicating drinks. The country liquor (*daru*) of Mahua blossoms is very popular and plays an important part in the ritual of their wedding ceremonies. When their finances permit, many Balahis like a drink of it. After the harvest quite a few spend a considerable part of their hard-earned savings in drinks. In every village there are some who rather go without a meal than without a drink. The liquor shops are much frequented, at least on bazaar days.

People who drink habitually can stand quite a lot of alcohol. They do not drink slowly and in sips, but pour down a whole glass in one gulp. For they are of the opinion that liquor is not for the tongue, but to warm the stomach. Balahis do not drink to enjoy the taste of liquor, but its intoxicating effects. They drink to forget for a while all their troubles and worries, and to feel like kings. After a drink cowards become brave and peace-loving men pugnacious and quarrelsome. They even then lose their customary respect of high-caste people and are ready to fight them. If some daring action

is required of Balahis, they must first be given a stiff glass of *daru* which makes heroes of them — as long as the intoxication lasts!

However, through the persistent and strong influence of the high-caste Hindus, the Balahis are gradually beginning to give up alcoholic drinks, at least in public. For their ceremonies they replace *daru* by *gur*. But privately they find it hard to break with this time-honoured habit.

In some villages there is much illicit distilling. Since the price of government-distilled *daru* is comparatively high, they find it cheaper to distil their own liquor. When caught, they cheerfully pay their fine or go to jail, and begin a new distillery as soon as they are released. It is a highly diverting sport for them to outwit the excise officials and the police, and they invent the most ingenious devices and subterfuges to disguise their illicit undertakings.

### *Pan*

*Pan* is a great luxury for the Balahis. It consists of areca nut, cloves, cardamon, and slaked lime offered on a leaf of betel-vine (*Piper betle*) rolled up in a quid. It is put into the mouth and chewed for a while. It is considered as a disinfective. The Balahis regard the use of *pan* as a privilege of the higher castes and therefore take it with a certain degree of elation, on feast days or on a visit to the bazaar.

### (3) The Banquet

A Balahi banquet is not only a gastronomical event, but also an important and solemn social affair. It is a red-letter day in the calendar of a Balahi and a pleasant change from the dreary routine of his hard and not too cheerful life. No Balahi ever fails to accept an invitation to a banquet, only physical inability will keep him away. He will walk for miles and ride in bullock carts for days, if necessary, to arrive in time for a dinner. With pleasure will he bear the inconvenience of a long journey, the forging heat of the tropical sun, the drenching rains of the monsoon, when he is on his way to a public dinner. Even illness cannot keep him away. If he does not feel well enough to eat his fill, he will at least sit with the diners and watch the whole affair and enjoy himself immensely.

But no Balahi will appear at a banquet unless he has been invited. It is strictly contrary to etiquette to arrive without an invitation. This rule saves the host the embarrassment of having to welcome guests on whom he has not counted and whom he really cannot afford to entertain. Sometimes a lifelong enmity results from a host's forgetting to invite a relative or friend, who will stay away

and not attend the banquet even if he could rightly presume that his invitation was omitted quite unintentionally.

The Balahis are never at a loss for reasons to hold a banquet. Every important event in their lives must be celebrated thus. Especially weddings and funeral ceremonies, caste meetings of all kinds, are unthinkable without a series of caste dinners. The more important a function, the more guests are invited. The future happiness of a bridal pair, the eternal peace of the deceased, the finality of a caste decision, depend largely on such caste dinners. Parents want to show their gratitude and joy for the birth of a son by giving a dinner; relatives and friends are invited to take part in a public banquet which completes and crowns the celebration of a marriage; the sons of a deceased parent want to show their filial love and sorrow by inviting many people to a funeral banquet. Wealthy people want to display their plenty, but even the poor who can ill afford such heavy expenses incur them most willingly, even if by doing so they have to sell their last bullock, or have to take a loan from the money-lender with the most ruinous results for their future.

The preparations for a public dinner begin often days in advance. If a meal has to be prepared for many guests, the whole male population of the village is requested to help. While the women get busy with cleaning the grain and grinding the flour, the men arrange everything required for the cooking. They collect wood in the jungle, chop it for fuel, bring the provisions, and fetch water for cooking. Even the cooking and baking is done by the men. Of course, only a few of the whole crowd of men really work, the others just stand or sit about, shout orders, smoke the pipe, and talk. Guests arrive and are welcomed, new acquaintances are made, marriage matches are arranged, bullocks and fields are sold or bought or exchanged, and between all this confusion and turmoil of squatting, talking and gesticulating groups a few men toil and sweat to prepare the dinner.

The usual festive banquet consists of the following dishes: rice, *dal*, *gur*, and *ghi*. The rice is boiled in huge brass vessels, generally the property of the whole village community. These vessels cannot be placed over the usual fire-places; they are too big and too heavy for such small mud-structures. Therefore the Balahis dig a ditch in the court-yard of the host, about a foot broad and deep enough to absorb a fair amount of fuel. Across this ditch the cooks place iron rods or plough shares (*kusla*), as a kind of grate. The heavy vessels are placed on this grate by means of a lever which consists of two bamboo sticks, tied together at one end. When a pot has to be lifted, the bamboo sticks are placed around the brim of the pot like a fire-

tongs and tied also with a rope at the open end. These huge pots have a slight inward curve just below the brim so that the improvised tongs get a firm grasp, and the pots can be lifted by two or more men.

Before boiling the rice is washed in cold water, then put in the pot and boiled. After cooking the pot is lifted from the fire, the water is poured away, and then the rice is heaped onto a rough cloth or onto the network of a bedstead to strain it. At last it is spread out upon a large sheet to dry. While the rice is being boiled, another pot is put aside for the *dal* (pulse) which takes a longer time to cook. Rice and *dal* are, of course, boiled in water to which salt has been added.

No spices are mixed in the dishes of a dinner prepared for a large number of guests. The Balahis say that it would take too much time to grind the *mirchi* (pepper).

At last, when the meal is prepared, the *nai* goes through the village and calls one man of each house to come to the house of the host. On their arrival the host once more formally invites them and their whole family to be his guests. On that occasion, the guests are often requested to contribute some money for the purchase of liquor (*chaki*). Each guest pays a small sum, while the host contributes the rest of the money required for buying the necessary quantity.

Nowadays, however, the Balahis often prefer to buy *gur* and *ghi* instead of liquor. Under the strong influence of the Hindus who frown upon the drinking of liquor, the Balahis are beginning to abstain from drinking in public. Public opinion is already so strong that although many Balahis still enjoy a good drink in private, they are reluctant to admit their weakness for *garam pani* (hot water) in public. They may even go so far as to refuse to drink it, but afterwards drop in at the liquor shop in the company of a few intimate friends. As a rule, however, liquor should be served at a funeral banquet and, often, is still being served at weddings. Before the men drink, they dip a finger into the glass and sprinkle a few drops of liquor on the ground, saying at the same time: *Ram! Ram!* At a funeral banquet the chief mourner is served first. He takes a mouthful of liquor, but spits it out at once, pretending that he cannot enjoy his drink so soon after the death of his relative. But then he takes another gulp, and then some more, each time apparently with increasing pleasure. After him the other guests drink, likewise paying homage to the memory of the deceased by spitting out the first mouthful. When the bottles are empty, the meal begins. Balahi women abstain from alcoholic drinks.

Now the guests sit down in lines, the women a little apart from the men and boys, at the other end of the line.

Sometimes an offering is made immediately before dinner is served. The host goes to the pile of rice and prays to the gods that it may suffice for all the guests. For he would be much blamed if the party were to run short of rice and some of the guests were to leave the banquet hungry. If such a thing happened, people would talk about it for years and blame the host for his stinginess, even if it was only lack of foresight that had caused him to supply scanty provisions.

At a funeral banquet an offering is also made to the deceased's spirit, on the spot where he breathed his last. *Dhup*, a mixture of *joari* bread, rice, *gur* and *ghi*, is burned in offering.

At last all are seated in lines. All are determined to fill their bellies to the utmost capacity. It is astounding how much a Balahi stomach can digest without bursting! Even small children sit before a huge mountain of rice and finish it in no time, soon clamouring for a second helping.

It is said that some Balahis fast the day previous to a banquet or even take a purgative to increase their stomach's capacity. The story goes that once a famous eater, Chagan of Aulia, went to Pandhana to a funeral banquet. He ate an enormous quantity of rice, *dal*, *gur* and *ghi*, fully living up to his reputation as a voracious eater. After the dinner he returned to Aulia, belching with satisfaction. On the way he met a friend who invited him to another dinner in a near Balahi village, and promised him not mere rice and *dal*, but *sirapuri* (wheat cakes baked in *ghi*). With consternation and grief the man heard that he had attended the wrong banquet! Instead of filling his stomach with *sirapuri*, he had eaten only rice and *dal*. He felt annoyed. To do justice to a *sirapuri* dinner with a stomach full to bursting with rice and *dal* was out of question. But the good man was not willing to miss the rare opportunity of a *sirapuri* banquet. So he sat down at the way-side, stuck his finger deep down his throat and out came everything that he had eaten at the banquet! With an empty stomach he then cheerfully took the road to the village where the *sirapuri* banquet was to take place. But who can imagine his chagrin when he arrived at the village too late! The banquet was already over and not a crumb had been left for him!

The guests are served their food on plates made of big leaves of the Palas tree, which are stitched together by their stems. The villagers, however, usually bring their own plates along. It is the *nai's* duty to supply the leaf-plates; for a hundred he is paid about 8 annas.

To serve at a dinner-party and to wait on the guests, is a meritorious act. But this is only partly the reason, why a banquet never lacks a good number of waiters. Another reason is, that the waiters

eat their *khana* after the general banquet is over, and take what is left over for themselves. The waiters are kept busy running along the lines. They are barefooted like the guests — no Balahi will enter the lines with his shoes on! The waiters carry the rice in baskets, and pour with a big ladle so much on each plate till the guest behind the plate says: "*Bas!*" (enough). Other servers follow with a pot of *dal*, and pour the *dal* in the hole, made by each guest, on top of his pile of rice. Then comes yet another who pours a few crumbs of *gur* on the plate, while a fourth dips his fingers in a pot with hot *ghi* and sprinkles a few drops on each plate. Flat cakes of *joari* or wheat bread are served as a side-dish.

When every guest has been served, the host and his family form a procession. The host walks ahead, his wife follows him, her hands tied with the ends of her husband's turban. Often a band of musicians accompany them, playing the *sing*. The procession proceeds along the lines of guests. With joined hands the host and his relatives touch the ground before each guest and greet him with "Ram! Ram!" This is called *panw lagana* (the touching of feet). Sometimes also a few guests join the group to express their feeling of brotherly love.

After this ceremony of welcome the guests begin to eat. The hosts do not usually take part in the meal. Children have not the patience to wait, till all the preparatory ceremonies are performed. They have already finished half their plates, when their elders begin to eat.

All eat by mixing with their right hand a morsel of rice with *dal*, *gur*, and *ghi*. They form a small ball of the mixture, which they lift to the mouth with three fingers. At intervals they drink water from the *lota* beside them. This *lota* they usually bring along themselves. Sometimes a new *lota* is supplied to each guest by the host. The guest is then allowed to take it home as a present. When the first plate is emptied, they may ask for a second helping. Everybody eats to his heart's content. The meal is taken without much talking. It is a solemn act.

After the meal all get up, cleanse their mouths and go home. The servers come and collect the plates with the morsels of food. This is called *jhutha*. All plates are thrown on a heap, and given to the cattle. The village dogs are busy meanwhile to devour as much of the remainder of the banquet as they can get. While the Balahis eat the leavings of a dinner of the higher castes, there is no caste so low as to touch the *jhutha* of the Balahis.

After the banquet many guests yoke their bullocks and leave at once. Others go and visit their friends or relatives in the village, and may even pass the night with them. But it is not considered polite to bother the host any longer, or to demand another meal from him.

Usually all his resources are exhausted by the one big festive banquet that he has just given and he would not be able to extend his hospitality for another day.

Sometimes instead of the usual dishes of rice and *dal*, *joari* or wheat cakes are baked, then broken into small crumbs and fried in *gur* and *ghi*. Or *laddu* are served, balls consisting of a mixture of sugar and cream, baked in *ghi*.

Frequently it happens that such a public dinner in which huge quantities of food are prepared is more or less a failure from the gastronomical point of view. Either the rice is not boiled well, or the *dal* is not done properly, or too much salt has been added, while *gur* and *ghi* were used too sparingly; but however the meal may have tasted, it is eaten cheerfully by all. Only afterwards does criticism set in, and complaints are heard. The host is criticised for his stinginess, or the cooks are blamed for their negligence, but in the end usually even the severest critics must admit that they have had a good time and have enjoyed a chat with old friends and long-missed acquaintances.

The number of guests at a Balahi banquet varies considerably. Sometimes only a few relatives or friends are invited to celebrate a certain event with the family. If a host cannot or does not want to feed the whole village community, he invites at least the children of the village for a distribution of sweetmeat or *gur*. If he can do more, he gives a dinner to which one or two members of each family in the village are invited. But usually all fellow villagers, men, women, and children, and relatives and guests from other villages are invited to a public dinner. The number of guests depends much, of course, on the number of families in the village: in a small community it is easy to invite all fellow villagers to a common dinner, while in a village with a hundred and more families a dinner for the whole community is a rare event. At funeral feasts the number of guests is often very large, and may amount to five hundred or more, while at large caste meetings the diners may count even several thousand.

#### Time and Manner of Taking Their Meals

The Balahis usually eat twice a day. In the cold season at about 9 or 10 a.m., and in the evening at 8 or 9 p.m. In the hot season and during the monsoon they eat a morsel in the morning, just the remainder of the previous evening's dinner; the first full meal is taken at noon and dinner in the evening. The main meal is always dinner in the evening.

A full-grown man usually eats two *joari* cakes, about finger-thick, with *dal* or other spiced vegetable, or half a pound of rice (measured before boiling), with *dal* or vegetable. But there are some

heavy eaters among the Balahis who can, if they get a chance, eat six to eight heavy *joari* cakes. They eat their fill at banquets where there is no limit to the amount placed at their disposal.

But most of the Balahis are also quite used to starvation-rations. In times of need they often eat only once a day. When they feel hungry, they drink water. Some go to sleep when they have nothing to eat, and thus forget that they are hungry.

The Balahis consider taking a meal an important act. It is against Balahi etiquette to disturb anybody when he is eating. If a visitor is present at meal-time, he must be either invited to join or else he must take his leave.

Balahis may not eat with members of other castes. Of caste-fellows the *nai*, lepers of advanced stage, and unclean or out-casted persons must eat separately, or at least use their own cups and plates.

After eating beef, the Balahis feel polluted and must take a bath of purification. Such a bath is necessary if afterwards they want to worship their gods or perform any other act for which ceremonial purity is required.

At public dinners, men and women may eat at the same time. But at home men and boys eat first, served by the women or girls who may sit down to their own meal only after the men have had their fill. Small boys may eat with the women, but bigger boys never do so.

The men often take off their shirts before they sit down for their meals. But at public dinners they do not undress. All take off their shoes, however, before they begin to eat, and no one comes to a dinner party without first removing his shoes.

At home the diners sit on the floor, in the house or on the verandah, seldom in the court-yard. Each diner has his own plate before him and at his left a *lota* of water. Food is taken only with the right hand, while the left hand can be used to hold the cup when drinking. The left hand should not touch food because it is used for cleaning after a call of nature.

Food is served on whatever plates and in whatever pots the family may possess. Even the poorest Balahis have some brass plates and brass cups (*lota* or *kalas*).

If there are not sufficient brass plates at hand for the number of diners, the food is served on leaf-plates. The leaf-plate (*pai*) is made from the leaves of the Palas tree (*Butea frondosa*) which are stitched together with bamboo slivers or bits of straw. A leaf plate is round and almost a foot in diameter. These plates are used only once and thrown away after the meal.

On a journey the Balahis also make cups from these leaves when they feel thirsty. Two big leaves are pinned together by their stalks and the sides folded up and kept together in the hollow of the hand. They form an excellent cup. After use the leaves are thrown away.

A family of six persons (man and wife, a grown-up son and three smaller children) consume in a month, under ordinary conditions, the following amount of food stuff:

Article:	Price (pre-war) <sup>82)</sup>
1 bag of <i>joari</i> (about 170 Engl. pints of grain)	Rs. 7 — 0 — 0
1 seer of salt (2 pounds)	0 — 1 — 6
4 pounds of <i>mirchi</i> (red pepper)	0 — 12 — 0
6 seers of <i>dal</i> (10 and a half pints)	0 — 15 — 0
1 seer of sweet oil (2 pounds)	0 — 3 — 0
4 pounds of <i>haldi</i> and <i>lassun</i>	0 — 6 — 0
tobacco (for chewing)	0 — 2 — 0
tobacco (for smoking)	0 — 1 — 0

## Chapter XXIX

### Principal Occupations of the Nimar Balahis

According to the oldest traditions of the Balahis their principal means of earning a livelihood was in former times spinning and weaving. Before the industrialisation of textile production the entire demand for cloth by the peoples of India was met by producers of hand-spun and hand-woven fabrics. Naturally in those days the spinning and weaving trades engaged a large number of workers, since with the primitive methods of production prevalent at that time the great demand for cloth could only be satisfied by a correspondingly large number of producers. It is therefore quite probable that, as the Balahi traditions assert, the relatively numerous Balahis in the Nimar could maintain themselves solely by their work at the spinning wheel and at the hand-loom.

But with the invention of the power-loom and its introduction into India, the successive industrialisation of the spinning and weaving trades, and the large import of cheap foreign textile goods, the Balahi spinners and weavers gradually lost their customers since with their primitive methods of production they could not compete with the industrial output. Thus they were slowly forced to give up their traditional craft and had to look out for new ways of earning a livelihood.

<sup>82)</sup> Now, after the war, prices are three to five times higher than before.

These new sources of income were provided by the great increase of cultivation in Central India. About the same time when the Balahis were ousted from their traditional profession the political situation in Central India improved much and consequently more land was taken into cultivation by immigrants who moved in in great numbers. Thus a great demand for agricultural labourers was created which was conveniently met by the unemployed Balahis. Doubtlessly at that time they could also have acquired land for cultivation at cheap rates, but their low social status must have prevented many from aspiring to the respected position of cultivators, while others found that they were incapable of managing a farm, since they were ignorant of tilling the soil or lacked the capital required for successfully running it. The natural consequence was that the Balahis, and other castes in the same economic situation, became the farm-servants and field-labourers of the cultivators in Central India. And this is still their main occupation in the Nimar District.

According to the statistics published by the Census of India 1931 (the Census of 1941 has been taken but never published) only 2.6 per cent of all Balahi earners were cotton weavers, while 73.0 per cent were employed as field-labourers, wood-cutters etc. Only 12.2 per cent were cultivators of any kind, 2.0 per cent raisers of livestock, and 10.2 per cent had other various occupations. (Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I. p. 265).

In the following table I shall give the exact data:

Occupation of Balahis in the Nimar District in 1931:

	Males	Females
Population dealt with:		
Earners . . . . .	8,537	5,306
Working dependants . . . . .	915	2,660
Non-working dependants (both sexes) . . . . .	12,783	

	Males	Females
1) Exploitation of animals and vegetation:		
Income from rent of land . . . . .	20	4
Cultivators of all kinds . . . . .	2460	44
Agents and managers of landed estates, planters, forest officers, their clerks, rent collectors . . . . .	1	—
Field labourers, wood cutters, etc. . . . .	4512	5071
Raisers of livestock, milkmen, herdsmen . . . . .	240	5
Fishing and hunting . . . . .	—	—

	Males	Females
II) Exploitation of minerals:		
Owners, managers, clerks, etc. . . . .	—	6 <sup>93)</sup>
Labourers . . . . .	—	—
III) Industry:		
Cotton weavers (Principal means of livelihood) . . . . .	246	36
Cotton weavers (Subsidiary means of livelihood) . . . . .	14	9
Cotton weavers (working dependants) . . . . .	17	7
Cotton weavers (principally, but with a subsidiary occupation) . . . . .	32	1
Artisans and other workmen . . . . .	111	—
IV) Transport:		
Owners, managers, ship's officers, etc. . . . .	—	95 <sup>94)</sup>
Labourers, boatmen, carters, palki bearers, etc. . . . .	96	13
V) Trade . . . . .	71	—
VI) Public force:		
Commissioner and gazetted officers . . . . .	—	—
Others . . . . .	640	—
VII) Public administration:		
Gazetted officers . . . . .	—	—
Others . . . . .	18	4
VIII) Professions and Liberal Arts:		
Religious . . . . .	2	—
Lawyers, doctors and teachers . . . . .	2	2
Others . . . . .	9	—
IX) Persons living on their income . . . . .	1	9
X) Domestic service . . . . .	8	—
XI) Insufficiently described occupations:		
Contractors, clerks, cashiers, etc. . . . .	1	3
Labourers, unspecified . . . . .	77	5
XII) Beggars and prostitutes . . . . .	22	—

### (1) The Balahi Cultivator

Generally speaking, the Balahi farmer is a poor cultivator. Compared with the hard-working and thrifty farmers of the cultivating castes, the Balahi is indolent, ignorant, and improvident. His heart

<sup>93)</sup> The entrance of 6 Balahi females as owners, managers, clerks, etc. of mines is probably a mistake of the enumerator! (The author.)

<sup>94)</sup> Census of India 1931 vol. XII, part, II, p. 275—279. (The return of 95 Balahi females employed in 'Transport' is probably a mistake of the enumerator.)

is not in his work: too often he finds an excuse for interrupting it and for leaving his field on some other errand. His fields are usually badly prepared for the sowing, he is often careless about the proper time for the sowing, he knows little about the selection of seeds and rotation of crops, he is too often neglectful in tending the growing crops. He does not plan ahead, the result of which is that he is out of money when he most urgently needs it; he is at one time idle, at another over-worked, instead of labouring steadily and continually as he should.

For these and other reasons few Balahi farmers are successful or wealthy cultivators. In a village, opened about forty years ago, there are today about fifty Balahi families and as many families of various cultivating castes or of semi-aboriginal stock (Muwasi-Korkus). When the village was started, the new settlers were all equally poor, almost destitute. Today, after forty years, most of the families of the proper cultivating castes can be called wealthy, four of them are almost rich, about half a dozen of the semi-aboriginal Korkus are fairly wealthy, while only three of the fifty Balahi families can be said to be in the latter position. In this same village several of the Balahi field-owners have leased their fields to farmers of the cultivating castes, while they themselves work as field-servants or occasional labourers!

Many Balahis in the Nimar may have lost their fields through misfortune and the exploitation of the money-lenders, but other important causes of their present economic depression are lack of interest, incompetence, and reckless spending. Their whole mentality is not yet sufficiently adjusted to steady and consistent cultivation of the soil. Farming is a profession that has been forced upon them through the decay of one of the main Indian home-industries.

In the cultivation of his field the Balahi farmer follows more or less faithfully the methods of the other farmers in Central India. His implements and agricultural tools, his crops, his methods of cultivation, differ in no way from those of the other cultivators of the country, only that generally his fields are smaller and of poorer quality, his implements fewer and in less good order, his working cattle of cheaper quality, and his crops less carefully tended.

## (2) Agricultural Implements and Their Use

### (a) The Plough

The plough (*hal*) (Fig. No. 5 and 6) used by the Balahis, consists of five parts: the body (*nagara*) of the plough which is composed of a heavy log of wood about  $3\frac{1}{4}$  feet long and half a foot thick, with an obtuse bend in the middle. The two halves of the body, usually

one piece, are sometimes two separate pieces, joined by mortise and tenon. The body is thickest in the middle, the upper part being somewhat flattened on two sides, while the lower ends in a pointed top. To this lower part (*chan* or *parchi*) is attached the iron plough

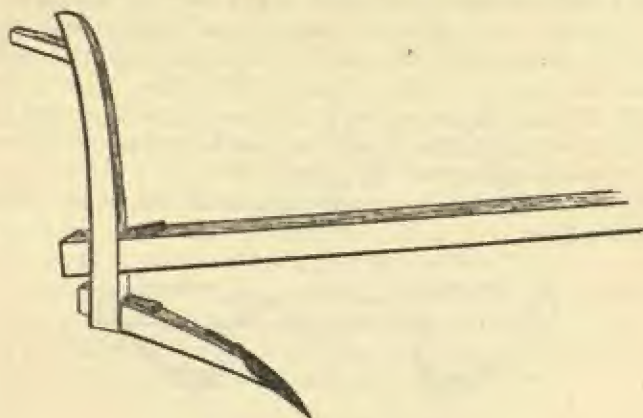


Fig. 5. The Plough (*hal*).

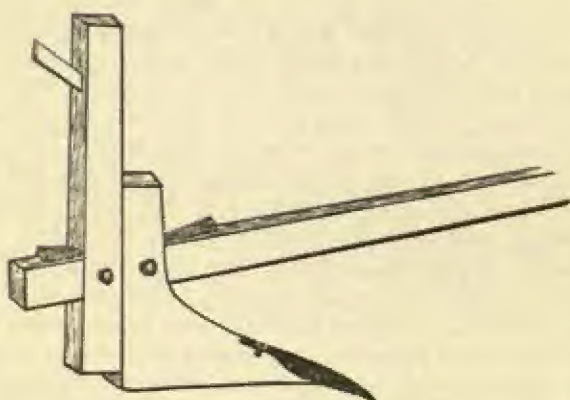


Fig. 6. A heavy plough (*hal*).

share (*kusta*) which is held tight by means of a hook. The share is about 14 inches long and spear-shaped. The pointed upper end is affixed by an iron hook to the inner side of the wooden boot, while the broader lower end, with curved edges around the top of the sole, projects about four inches beyond it. The beam by which the bullocks draw the plough is set in the plough slightly above the obtuse angle

in the body to which it is fixed by means of a wedge. A short peg (*hal ka kila*) is driven through the uppermost end of the body to serve as a handle for the ploughman.

The body of the plough is made of *babul* wood (*Acacia arabica*) or of the equally tough and durable *tiwas* wood (*Ougenia dalbergioides*). The beam is usually of *khair* wood (*Acacia catechu*). The weight of the body varies from 40 to 60 pounds and stirs up the soil to a depth of about six inches. It does not, however, turn the soil but only makes it loose and uproots the weeds. In stony ground in which a broad iron plough share would get stuck or even break, the common country plough serves its purpose well.

Before the war a new plough cost about Rs. 5, the yoke alone less than a rupee.



Fig. 7. The Yoke (*jori*).

The yoke (*jori*) (Fig. No. 7) is about six feet long with a projecting knob in the middle and a hole at either end. The yoke is tied with a strong rope to the shaft of the plough. Instead of a rope, leather thongs are sometimes used for this purpose. When the yoke is laid on the necks of the bullocks, it is fastened by means of a *jot*, a neck-band about two inches broad in the middle, with slings at both ends. One end of the *jot* is slung around the yoke between bullock and beam, the other around a forked iron or wooden peg stuck through a hole near the extreme end of the yoke.

To press the plough share deeper into the ground the beam of the plough is often loaded with a heavy stone, called *ghangra*.

A field should be ploughed at least every second year with a *hal*. The ploughing for the monsoon crop begins as soon as possible after the harvest of the spring crop and, if necessary, continues throughout the hot season. However, no farmer likes to plough in the hot season, because it is too exhausting for man and bullocks. Ploughing should be finished at the beginning of the hot season so that the rays of the sun may have time to kill all the uprooted weeds. For the spring-crop the field is ploughed either during the monsoon or at once after the cutting of the monsoon crop. A field overgrown with *khunda* or *khas* weeds (*Andropogon muricatus* — Cuscut grass) can only be cleaned properly in the rainy season when the soil is moist and the roots give way easier. But even then such a field must be

ploughed twice or else, the tough roots of these weeds cannot be uprooted properly. The second ploughing is done crosswise to the first.

As a rule, a farmer ploughs from early in the morning till noon, and after a pause of about two hours, during the afternoon till sunset. In the hot season some farmers plough at night as soon as the moon rises. More work can be done with less exhaustion during the cool nights than in the scorching heat of the day.

In the Nimar the farmers plough in curved lines; they say that straight furrows do not look well. If several ploughmen work one field, they always plough side by side. One ploughman begins, the second man draws his furrow parallel to that of the first man, just a little behind him so as not to interfere with his plough. When one ploughman pauses, all the others have to stop as well.

The plough is drawn by one pair of bullocks which are goaded on by means of a long staff, with an iron pin at one end, and an iron blade at the other with which the *kusla* is occasionally cleaned of the mud sticking to it. The goad is called *birana*.

### The Iron Plough

Every third or fourth year a field should be ploughed with a modern iron plough, since only the broad share of this plough is able to turn the surface soil properly. It also cuts deeper into the ground and brings up fresh, unused soil. The heavy iron plough can be drawn only by three or four pairs of bullocks. Since only a few farmers possess the number of bullocks required to draw an iron plough, two or three combine and plough the field of one farmer for a couple of days, and then for the same number of days the field of another. The plough may also be borrowed from a wealthy farmer, at a monthly rent of Rs. five to six. The rent of a pair of bullocks for ploughing costs two annas a day, without the ploughman. The bullocks must be fed by the farmer who has borrowed them.

### The Drill-Plough

The drill plough (*nari*) (Fig. 8) is constructed like the *hal*, but about eight inches above the top of the sole a hole is pierced through which passes a bamboo tube with a wooden bowl on top for the reception of the seed. The iron share of the drill plough is smaller than that of the *hal* and curved so as not to interfere with the seed-tube which passes through the sole of the plough's body.

With this drill plough, the seeds of the spring-crops, wheat, gram and *dhanya*, are sown in furrows. While a man ploughs, a woman walks at his side and pours the seed-grain into the tube. The seed

falls a few inches behind the plough share into the furrow and is at once covered with soil falling back into the furrow as the plough passes on. The furrows should be kept close together, only a hand's breadth apart, and proceed in curved, parallel rows.

The seeds of the spring-crops must be sown in deep furrows where the soil is still moist from the monsoon and where the dew collects in the cold season, since little or no rain falls during this time of the year.

A field is ploughed in conveniently large portions. Care is taken against making the furrows too long, for the Balahi farmers say that

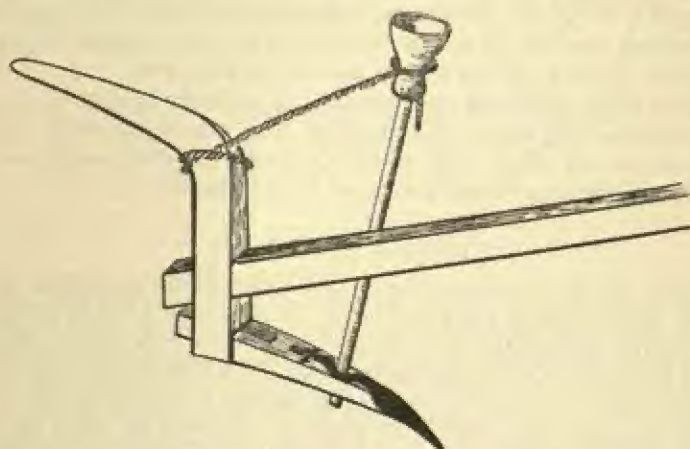


Fig. 8. The Drill-Plough (*nari*).

if this be the case the bullocks soon become exhausted. At every turn, after finishing a furrow, the bullocks get a few moments of rest, just sufficient to recover their breath. A longer pause is made every few hours to give the beasts a rest and to smoke a pipe. If a ploughman has begun his work early in the morning, he takes a short meal after about two hours.

#### (b) The Harrow

The harrow which when the ploughing is over levels the ground and removes the remaining weeds, is called *bakhar*. Often in a year when the field is not ploughed harrowing serves as a substitute for ploughing. Sometimes a field is harrowed before the ploughing to clean it of the remaining cotton stems or the stumps of the *joari* and *tuar* stalks which with their sharp edges might injure the feet of

plough-men and animals. Such wounds heal very slowly and are painful. The field is also harrowed after the first rain-showers of the monsoon just before the sowing, to uproot the weeds that have survived the hot season and to level the ground.

The harrow (Fig. 9) consists of a short but heavy beam (*khod*) about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet in length and half a foot thick. It is commonly of *temru* wood (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) or of *tiwas*. As a scraper an iron blade is infixed to the body of the *bakhar* by means of two props

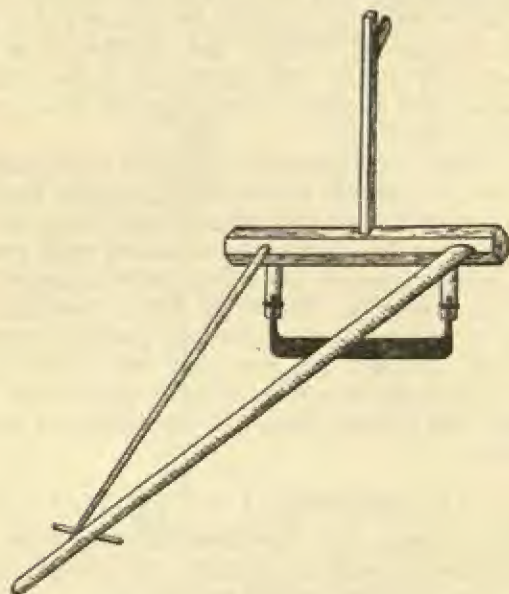


Fig. 9. The Harrow (*bakhar*).

(*danti*) which are about a foot long, made of *babul* wood. The blade, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ft long and 3 or 4 inches broad, is called *phas*. Iron clamps keep the ends of the blade firmly fixed to the props.

The heavy body of the *bakhar* is drawn over the ground at right angles to the furrows. It is guided by means of an upright wooden stilt with a handle on top of it. From the concave side of the body pass two poles (of *khair* wood), called *dandi*, of unequal length. The longer pole has a length of about nine feet, the shorter and thinner one is six and a half feet long. Near the end of the shorter beam a wooden peg is driven through both. A thick rope, of coconut fibre, slung around the yoke at the end of the longer pole, is brought

back and wound around the peg, thus securing an equal strain on both poles.

The *bakhar* is drawn by one pair of bullocks. By altering the angle of the blade to the ground, it can be made either just to scrape over the surface, if the ground is hard, or, if it is soft, to penetrate deeper and to work it more effectively. For deeper work the driver often stands upon the body of the *bakhar*, or a heavy stone is placed on the poles where they join the body of the harrow. Sometimes a second harrowing is required to clean a field properly, in this case the *bakhar* being led once more across the furrows of the first.

After the harrowing, women and children are employed to remove the uprooted weeds and stubble from the field. They are piled up in heaps and burned, or thrown into holes and gullies to prevent erosion of the field.

Trunks of trees and bushes, and the often deep-lying roots of the *khas* grass, must be removed by means of pick-axe (*gashti*) and hoe (*paura*). The top of the wooden plough and the props holding the blade of the harrow often break on contacting such roots hidden in the ground. Balahi farmers are often rather careless and do not clean their fields properly. Especially after breaking a new field, many bushes and trunks of trees are left, plough and harrow being led around them. Stones, too, are often the cause of breaking a plough top or the props of a harrow, as they are only rarely taken out of the field and heaped along the headlands or used to fill up holes and gullies.

### (c) The Seeding Plough (*tiffan*)

The Balahi farmers, like the other farmers of the country, use two different kinds of seeding ploughs, one being the drill-plough described above, the other the so-called *tiffan*.

The *tiffan* is similar in build to a *bakhar*, only that its body is slightly longer ( $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 ft). In its body (*khar*) are set three props, 13 to 18 inches apart from one another. These props are shod with small iron tops, in shape similar to the iron share of the wooden plough (*hal*). These iron tops are attached to the props by means of iron clamps. If the soil is hard or rocky, the iron-shod props draw the furrows into which the seed is sown. If the soil is soft, no iron tops are required and they are often taken off to prevent them from penetrating too deeply into the ground.

To each prop is attached a seed-drill (*sarta*) (Fig. No. 10). A string, about a yard long, connects the lower end of the drill with the prop of the *tiffan*. The seed-drill is a hollow bamboo tube, about three feet long, with a wooden shoe at the bottom to keep it in an upright position. The lower end of the tube through which the seeds pass

and fall into the furrow, is driven through the heel of the wooden shoe, which prevents its getting choked with mud. To the upper end of the seed-tube is attached a wooden bowl for the reception of the seed.

The sowing woman holds the seed-drill upright with her wrist, which rests on the brim of the bowl, while the fingers pour the seed-grain into it. From a bag tied around her waist or a small basket (*dhuli*) held in front of her, she takes a handful of grain and pours it slowly into the bowl. When one hand is empty, she begins to pour with the other which she has filled in the meantime, so that a continuous and regular flow of seed is assured.



Fig. 10. The Seed-drill (*sarta*).

Since a seed-drill is attached to each of the three props of the *tiffan*, three furrows are sown with grain at one and the same time. In case only two women are available for the sowing, the middle drill is left out. The middle row, thus left empty, is sown on the return journey of the *tiffan*, one side prop of which is now set on the empty row.

The sowing begins early in the morning with breaks only when the women refill their empty bags. At noon a short rest is taken for a hasty meal. Then the sowing continues till sunset. Men and bullocks are very tired in the evening, but all the workmen feel happy, for they all prefer sowing to any other farm-work.

The farmers in the Nimar usually do not begin sowing at once after the first break of rain in the beginning of the monsoon. They

wait till the soil is moistened after repeated heavy showers. It often happens that after the first heavy rain two or three weeks of fair weather follow. The tender seedlings would wither during this time, the more so since the soil is still rather warm. The sowing season usually begins in the second half of June, after Mirag (a fortnight after *Chait sudri*).

Poor people who have no *tiffan* often use a *bakhar* without a blade, with a seed-drill affixed to each prop. On uneven rocky ground or in heavy soil the *bakhar* works even better than the *tiffan*. If only one woman is sowing, the seed-drill is attached to one prop only.

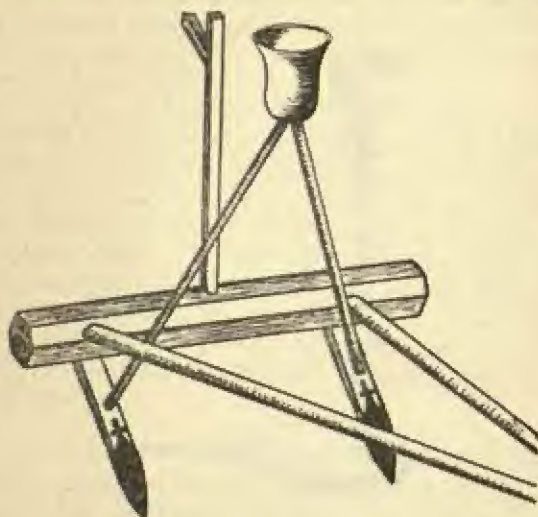


Fig. 11. Two-forked Seed-drill.

while the other is drawn over the last furrow which has been sown, to cover the seed with soil. Sometimes a bunch of twigs is attached to the empty prop to sweep earth into the furrow.

Nowadays a new type of seed-drill (Fig. No. 11) has come into use: a two or three-forked tube by means of which two or three furrows can be fed by one sowing woman. But this seed-drill has its disadvantages: it is difficult to feed two or three channels equally from one bowl. Often one tube receives too much seed, while the other remains empty. Unless this new type of seed-drill is improved, it will not become popular.

Balahi farmers do not bother much about using good seed. Very few farmers are in the habit of selecting the best specimens of their

crops for seed. They are not willing to pay a higher price for their seed grain and consequently often sow grain of poor quality which gives a low yield. At the time of sowing they are generally so short of money that they are glad to get any kind of seed on loan from money-lenders and wealthy farmers. The usual rate of interest for seed-grain in the Nimar is 50 to 100 per cent, payable after the harvest. There is a Government-farm in the District where good seed is sold, but few Balahis can take advantage of it, since they have to pay in cash.

#### (d) The Weeding Plough

The weeding plough, used for weeding drill-sown monsoon crops, is called *kolpa*. It has the same form as the *bakhar*, but is smaller

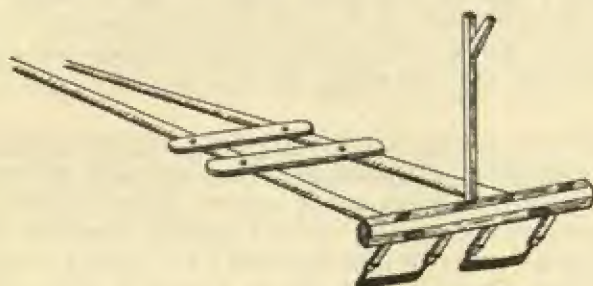


Fig. 12. The Weeding Plough (*Kolpa*).

and lighter, the blade is just broad enough to pass between the furrows without injuring the plants, growing in the furrows.

The *kolpa* not only uproots weeds, but also heaps soil around the tender stems of the plants.

The weeding plough is drawn by a pair of bullocks. If the bullocks are strong, two *kolpas* can be attached to a long yoke drawn by one pair of bullocks. Or two blades are fixed to the body which, for this purpose, is of double length. Such a double-bladed *kolpa* (Fig. No. 12) can be guided by one man, while for the usual arrangement of two *kolpas* at one yoke two men are required for the guiding of the plough. But the double-bladed *kolpa* has the disadvantage that it injures plants which are slightly out of line. If the man who guided the *tiffan* at the sowing was lacking in skill and did not make the rows perfectly parallel, the double-bladed *kolpa* cannot pass between the rows without either uprooting some plants or else leaving the weeds. If the cultivator has to handle only one *kolpa*, he can lift the blade when the passage between two furrows becomes too narrow.

The bullocks are yoked at such a distance from each other that they can walk between the furrows. They are muzzled to prevent them from nibbling the seedlings. The muzzle is a network, made either of strings or of the tail-hair of bullocks or horses. It is tied so tightly over the mouth of the bullocks that they can breathe only through the nose.

The blade of the weeding plough (*kolpa*) is about 12 to 14 inches long, and is from time to time sharpened by the village smith. It is slightly curved so that the corners may penetrate more deeply into the soil.

If necessary, the *kolpa* weeding is followed by hand-weeding. The implement used for the latter is the sickle. Hand weeding is done mostly by women and children, but if time presses, also men will lend a helping hand. Each weeder takes three rows, men usually four to six rows. The weeder squats between the rows and, loosening the soil with the sickle, uproots the weeds with the other hand.

If it has been raining continuously for a long time, so that *kolpa* weeding is impossible, the grass and the weeds must be removed by hand weeding before a *kolpa* can be applied. When rainless days are rare and therefore the necessity of hand weeding the more urgent, the price of hired labourers rises so high that poor farmers cannot afford to employ them. Thus many a Balahi farmer is either obliged to borrow money from the *sahukar* (money-lender) at high interest or to sacrifice his whole crop.

After each hand weeding a *kolpa* weeding follows immediately. The farmers say that one *kolpa* does the work of a hundred weeders. This is indeed so; however, for cotton and *til* (sesame) a hand-weeding cannot be dispensed with, since the weeds growing in the rows between the single plants have also to be uprooted. The *til* plants, besides, must be thinned out, a work which can be done only by skilled field-hands.

*Kolpa* weeding and hand-weeding keep the farmer in the Nimar busy throughout the monsoon. After he has cleaned his own field, he works in the fields of other farmers who are still behind schedule. Thus he is able to earn some money, for the wages are high at this time of the year.

#### (e) Fencing of Fields

Soon after the sowing is over, the fields are closed to grazing cattle. The herds which during the hot season were allowed to roam freely over them are now restricted to the grazing grounds proper, under the guard of a herdsman, specially employed for this purpose.

Still, fields adjacent to public ways or near the grazing grounds or the jungle, must be fenced in against straying cattle or deer coming at night from the jungle.

The fences consist of hedges of thorns, stems and branches of the *bor* tree (*Zizyphus vulgaris*). The stems are stuck in the ground in two narrow rows between which a horizontal layer of thorny branches gives the necessary filling.

For digging the holes along the field borders the farmer uses a spud which is called *ob* or *daran*. It is a heavy, forked piece of wood or iron. Getting hold of the two ends of the fork, the heavy tapered lower end is driven into the ground which has been previously moistened to make it soft.

The thorny stems and branches are not handled with bare hands, but by means of a crude wooden fork, called *dulia* or *jari*.

For the passage of people a narrow, forked trunk of a tree may be inserted in a fence. It will just allow a person to squeeze through the raised forks of the trunk, but will effectively bar the passage of cattle.

The thorn hedges are kept standing till some time after the harvest. Then they are gradually broken down by the grazing cattle and disappear almost wholly in the hot season when the dry branches and stems are used for fuel.

#### (f) Guarding the Crop

There is always the danger of stray cattle or of thieves when the time of the harvest approaches. Especially the vernal crops have to be watched because at that time of the year the grass on the grazing ground already begins to become scarce. A month or two before the harvest also the *joari* must be guarded against animals and thieves.

The watchman erects a hut (*mandap* or *machan*) in the centre of the field. The *mandap* is a kind of scaffolding with a small platform, resting on four slender posts, so high above the ground as to give the watchman a full view of the field. As a protection against rain, the platform is given a low roof of branches and leaves. On this *mandap* the watcher stays during the night being on the lookout for stray cattle, wild animals, and thieves. He is supposed to walk around the field, but few watchmen are faithful enough to do so. Muffled in their blankets against the cold, afraid of evil spirits lurking in the dark, they stay up on the *mandap* and move only when they hear some noise. Then they begin to shout and beat on tin cans, or fire off crackers, and the so-called *patakha*, a lead-pipe with a bend at one end. A handful of gun-powder is put in the bend and it is fired off by pushing an iron stick through the pipe. Deer and stray cattle may be chased away by the noise, but scarcely the wild pigs

which in troupes invade the fields where *joari* or ground-nuts are grown. The wild pigs do more damage by wanton destruction than by really eating the crop. They break down the *joari* stalks and eat up the heads, or dig up the ground-nuts eating a part and soiling the others. Wild pigs can be held off effectively only by shooting with a gun, while deer and stray cattle are more easily chased away.

In every bigger village there is an enclosure where stray cattle can be confined till the owner comes to claim them. For his negligence he has to pay a fine, generally a rupee per head per day for a bullock or cow, and Rs. 2 for a buffalo. The owner of the field where the beast has been found gets no recompensation for the damage unless he reports the matter to the police. Much damage is done by stray cattle, either because the owners are too negligent to tie their cattle properly, or because they intentionally drive their animals into the field of another village for a good feed.

The guarding of a *joari* field is rather exacting for the watchman, for such a field must be guarded by day and by night. During the day clouds of birds, sparrows, parrots and others, perch in the *joari* fields and pick off the ripening grains. They do much harm. Scarecrows which are put up against this pest, beating tin cans, firing off crackers, shouting, all this is of no avail against the birds which fly off from one place to settle down at another.

The Balahis are generally keen on being employed as field guards. They thus earn good wages without much exertion. Sometimes they work during the day in the field while they watch at night. They then earn double wages. The pay of a field guard naturally varies according to the size of the field, the duration of the watch, and the kind of crop that has to be watched. The wages are higher if a field has to be guarded by day and by night. The usual wages are a *maund* of the grain that is being guarded (16 *chauki*) or Rs. 5 to 6 for two or three months of night watching.

#### (g) The Country Cart

Almost every farmer who owns a pair of bullocks has also one or two carts. A strong cart (*gari*) is needed for the transportation of goods, while for travelling a light cart, the so-called *damni*, is more suitable. But the essential parts of the structure are the same in both types, they differ only in size and in the quality of the material.

The carts which are in use in the Nimar District are two-wheeled. The diameter of the wheel measures from four to five feet. The wheel has a central nave, of hard wood, with a hole in the middle through which the iron axle passes set in an iron tube. The inner tube is always well oiled to prevent the axle from being worn out quickly. Around the outer edges of the nave are two iron hoops

which prevent it from splitting. Each wheel has twelve spokes two of which are held together by one of the six felloes of the wheel. A strong iron tire joins the six felloes together.

The two wheels of the cart are connected by an iron axle the ends of which are pierced. When the wheels are set on the axle, iron



Fig. 13. The Axle Box (*bedi*). a) Axle-box, b) Axle.

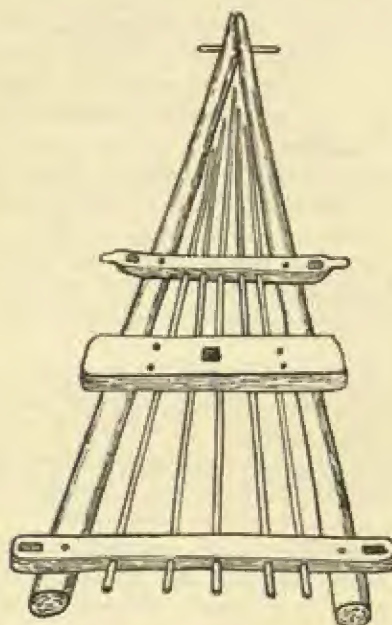


Fig. 14. The Body of a Balahi Cart.

nails are driven through the holes outside the wheels to prevent them from coming off. Over the axle, between the wheels, there is placed the wooden axle box (*bedi*) (Fig. No. 13) in which the axle revolves. On the axle box rests the body of the cart.

The body (Fig. No. 14) of the cart consists mainly of two beams, set in a sharp angle. The beams are wide apart at the back of the

cart, but meet in front where they are held together by a wooden pin. Two cross-beams are put on the longside beams, a short one in the middle, a longer one near the ends of the longside beams. A broad, thick board is placed on the longside beams over the axle box and connected with it in the middle by a long iron spike. The ends of both cross-beams are pierced, and pegs are stuck in the holes. The two pegs on each side of the cart are connected by bamboo poles, three on each side, passing through the pegs. Thin poles also connect the two cross-beams of the frame, thus forming the bottom of the cart.

A light cart, suitable for fast travel, is similarly constructed, but of lighter material. It has four side-boards, about two feet high, broadening out from a narrow bottom. Over it is spanned a circular hood of bamboo-wickerwork often covered with cloth. The cart is filled with grass, as high as the side boards go, to provide a soft seat. In front is the driver's seat — just a square board.

The price of a cart before the war was anything from Rs. 40 to 80. Except for the iron parts, many Balahis build their own carts, to save a carpenter's wages.

Road traffic in the Nimar is mainly by cart, at least in the open season. A cart for the conveyance of goods can carry a load of 12 to 20 *maunds* (a *maund*: 80 pounds). A light cart for travel can make about 20 miles a day, but a freight cart makes ordinarily only about ten miles. The rate for a day's hire of a cart before the war was one and a half rupees, and two rupees for the transportation of cotton or grass.

Light carts, used for travelling, carry four to six persons. The best bullocks have a speed of six miles per hour on a good road, but the average is four miles.

Old Balahis still remember the times when the wheels of their carts were large wooden discs, with a wooden axle. It took them a full day to cover a distance of five to ten miles in these carts. They were used only for carrying loads, travelling was done by foot. The Balahis are still nimble walkers and can cover long distances even with a heavy load on their heads without getting tired. But now only those walk who have neither bullocks nor carts.

Since the introduction of the bus service on the few metalled roads of the District the Balahis sometimes take advantage of this kind of transportation. The laws of untouchability do not apply to these vehicles of public traffic, and Balahis have usually no difficulty in getting a seat if they are able to pay for it. Some Balahis are even the proud owners of a bicycle.

In the time when field-work is not pressing, the owners of bullock-carts often hire out their carts for the transportation of goods.

Merchants engage them to haul their grain or cotton to the big market places, or to bring timber from the forest to the railway stations.

For such trips the Balahi carters prefer to travel in company. They count upon mutual assistance when a cart breaks down or the bullocks refuse to drag their load. Besides, there is less danger of being robbed when the carts proceed in a group, especially when they have to travel at night, as they generally do in summer.

According to Balahi tradition many of their caste fellows were in the past employed in the transport section of the various armies which fought and plundered in the Nimar before the British occupation. When peace was restored, a great number of carts were permanently employed for the transport of goods from one district to another, and from one province to the other till the two railway lines which now traverse the Nimar District were opened.

## Chapter XXX

### The Main Crops of the Balahis. Balahi Husbandry

#### (1) What the Balahis Sow

##### (a) *Joari*

Among the Balahis, as among most farmers of the Nimar, two varieties of *joari* (millet, *Andropogon sorghum*) are most popular: a white variety, called *ramkel*, growing well in medium and light soil, and *amner*, with yellowish grain, suitable for heavy soil. A good farmer selects the best heads of *joari* on the threshing floor and takes them home where he hangs them on a line dangling from the roof-tree so that rats cannot get at them. But most Balahi farmers forget to preserve their seed grain in this way and have to buy it when the time of sowing comes.

*Joari* is sown in a field that has not been ploughed for a year or two. For the farmers believe that the long stalks would not get sufficient hold in the loose soil of a newly ploughed field. A field on which it is to be sown is only harrowed by *bakhar* just before the rains start. After the first heavy showers, before the sowing begins, the field is again harrowed to kill the remaining weeds.

*Joari* is sown in rows 13 to 18 inches apart. It is usual to mix it with *urad* (*Phaseolus radiatus*), the proportion being one part *joari* to eight parts of *urad*.

The *urad* ripens about six weeks before the *joari* and is cut when the *joari* begins to blossom. After the *urad* has been cut the *joari* stalks are free of undergrowth and can develop freely.

*Joari* is sown with the three-tubed seeding plough, the *tiffan*. The *tiffan* is followed by a *dhulia*, a kind of light *bakhar*, but with a broader blade. The *dhulia* levels the furrows and covers the seed with soil while at the same time it cleans the field from weeds which have grown since the last harrowing.

No hand-weeding is required for *joari* and *urad* crops. The field is weeded twice with the *kolpa*. When the *urad* is in flower, weeding would only harm the blossoms. The harvesting of *urad* begins in October. While it is being cut, the grass and weeds growing between the lines are cut also and bound into small bundles. Thus the *joari* stalks now get sufficient space and air to grow properly.

Soon after the harvest of the *urad* the *joari* field must be guarded against wild pigs, deer, and straying cattle. As soon as the grains begin to develop, the field must be protected also against thieves and, in day-time, against birds. Sparrows and parrots do much harm to the ripening crops. Clouds of birds fly off when the field-guard beats a tin-can or fires off crackers. But they soon get used to the noise and keep on feasting in the fields, in spite of all efforts of the guards to drive them away.

The *joari* ripens in November-December. At the harvest the *joari* stalks are cut near the roots with sickles (*daranti*) and collected in small bundles. Each reaper cuts six to eight lines. The heads (*bhuta*) are cut off and collected in baskets by women who follow the reapers. Other workers carry the baskets to the carts which, when full, bring the *joari* to the threshing floor.

The threshing floor (*kala*) is either right on the field at some convenient place, or close to the village where a certain plot of wasteland is assigned to each farmer. At a suitable place in the *kala* a post is rammed into the ground. Around this post in a radius of three to six yards the ground is dug up, levelled, then water is poured on it and several bullocks made to walk over it till it turns into a quagmire, which when dry produces a smooth even surface. Then women make the threshing floor still smoother by giving it a coating of fresh manure. When the surface is dry, the heads of the *joari* are heaped around the centre post.

The *joari* stalks (*karbi*) are tied into bundles on the field and left there a few days to dry in the sun. Then they are carried to the *kala* and stored there as valuable fodder for the ploughing cattle.

When the rush of the harvest season has passed, the threshing of the *joari* may begin. The spikes are spread out on the threshing floor in a layer about a foot deep. This is done by means of a crooked fork (*ankri* or *kursil*) and a large wooden rake (*pachanga*). After a week or two of drying in the sun, the threshing begins. Three to six bullocks are tied together neck to neck and the rope

end of the last animal at one side is slung around the post in the centre of the pile of *joari* in such a way that it allows the animals to walk freely around the post and thresh out the grain with their feet. The muzzles of the bullocks are covered with a network of strings to prevent them from eating the grain. It takes about a day to thresh out a layer of *joari* heads, some six inches deep. In the evening the chaff is removed and heaped up in a corner of the *kala*, while the grain which has collected at the bottom of the threshing floor, is piled up in a convenient place. Then a new layer of *joari* heads is spread for another threshing.

When all the *joari* has been threshed, the chaff (*bhusa*) is again spread over the threshing floor and the bullocks are made to walk over it a second time until all the grain is threshed out.

After the threshing, the grain is winnowed. A three-legged stool (*tipsi*), about four feet high, is brought. One man steps on the stool while a second hands him a basket full of *joari* grain. Slowly the man pours the grain from the basket (*topli*) and allows the wind to blow away the chaff while the heavy grains fall to the ground. Another man squats on the ground where the grain collects in a pile and brushes off chips of straw or wood with a broom. Winnowing often takes a long time, when the breeze is not strong enough or when it blows in sudden gusts; then the workers sit idle and wait for the rising of a steady breeze. But if it happens that the wind blows strong and steady, three men can easily winnow eight bags of *joari* in a day.

The grain cleaned of the chaff is piled up in an oblong mound. Only after all has been winnowed, should it be measured and filled into bags. At last the grain is carried home and stored in the grain bins from which it is removed for consumption or for sale in the weekly market. Need of money forces many a Balahi farmer to sell his crop as soon as it is harvested.

The field labourers who are employed for the harvesting of the *joari* are paid their wages either in cash (in pre-war days a man got 3 to 4 annas a day, a woman 2 to 3 annas, now twice as much), or in grain. A *joari* cutter receives one bundle (*pula*) with the heads. He can select the biggest bundle. For cutting the heads from the stalks a woman receives a basket full of heads, or eight pounds (a *chauki*) of winnowed *joari*. The man who carries the baskets to the carts, earns two basketfuls of heads because his is the heaviest work. Each basket contains about four seers of *joari* (in measure, not weight!), in addition to this the cutters of the *joari* stalks receive also all the heads which have been overlooked by the women who cut off the heads from the stalks. A hard-working farm servant can earn his whole food-grain for a year in the harvest season.

The work is divided according to custom between men and women. Men cut the stalks, while women remove the heads from them and fill the baskets. Men, again, carry the baskets to the carts. The threshing bullocks are goaded by a man, the winnowing is also done by men, but a woman may lend a helping hand in filling the baskets and in brushing away any bits of straw from the winnowed grain.

The employment of many additional labourers is rather expensive for the farmer. They take away quite a considerable portion of the crop. But the harvesting of *joari* must be done in a hurry. No farmer feels secure from the cutting of the *joari* till the time when he can fill his grain bins. An untimely rain, or a herd of wild pigs, or a visit of thieves can do much harm to his crop. Once in the *kala*, the *joari* must be carefully guarded. If the threshing floor is in the field, the farmer stays out there practically day and night. His wife or his children bring him his meals out in the field, or else the whole family stays there the cooking also being done in the *kala*.

#### (b) *Urad*

*Urad* (*Phaseolus radiatus*) is, as said before, commonly grown together with *joari*. It is a popular crop, for it can be harvested first. The Balahi farmer pays his most pressing debts with the money he receives for his *urad*.

After being cut, the *urad* is not tied in sheaves, but piled up in the field in a huge stack. If a farmer is not in a hurry to sell his crop, he keeps the *urad* in the field till the *joari* is cut, threshed and winnowed. Only then is the *urad* removed to the threshing-floor, threshed and winnowed and filled into bags or into the grain-bins. The husks are fed to the cattle.

Field-labourers who are employed for the harvesting of the *urad*, are paid their daily wages in cash. Men and women are employed for cutting which is done with sickles. Heaps of convenient size are laid in rows on the field and allowed to dry for a few days. Then the *urad* is piled up in stacks which are covered with grass, as a protection against occasional rain-showers.

*Urad* is the favourite grain fodder for the working cattle, especially during the ploughing in the hot season. Each bullock receives half a pound or more of this grain, soaked in water, in the morning before work, and as much in the evening after a day's work. But *urad* is eaten also by the Balahis as *dal*, and is considered a tasty and nourishing dish.

### (c) Ground-Nuts

Another autumn crop is the ground-nut (*Arachis hypogaea* — *mung-phalli*). It is sown in June-July on light soil. The seedlings sprout in eight to ten days. A month later the *kolpa* is twice passed through the rows. Usually no weeding is required.

In October—November (*Karttik*) the crop is ready for harvesting. The nuts are dug out with the wooden plough and gathered by women. Field-labourers are paid either in cash or in kind. If the reaper prefers payment in kind, she gets one fifth of a day's picking.

The plants, both leaves and stalks, make good fodder for cattle, while the growth of ground-nuts is supposed to have a fertilising effect on a field.

The ground-nuts are eaten both raw and roasted, especially on days of fasting.

In the wild tracts of the district ground-nuts are in great danger from wild pigs which often ravage an entire field in a single night. But in the more open parts it is a popular crop and fetches a good price, as these nuts are in strong demand for the production of oil.

### (d) Other Grain Crops

Various grain crops which are grown by the Balahis in small quantities, are *bayra* (*Pennisetum typhoideum* — bulrush), *mung* (*Phaseolus mungo*), *kutki* (*Panicum miliare*), *sawan* (*Panicum frumentosum*), *kodon* (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*), the latter being a type of small millet. The Balahis say that before the introduction of *joari* they were growing these grains as their main crops, but now they are sown only in very poor soil. The small grain of these crops is sometimes a welcome change of diet.

### (e) Maize

As soon as the monsoon is about to begin, every Balahi farmer sows maize (*Zea mays* — *makka*) in his court-yard or on his threshing floor. Maize is not grown in large quantities in the fields. It is more a garden crop in the Nimar. Maize grain is not ground to flour, but eaten raw or roasted, already before the maize heads are fully ripe. Ripe maize heads are kept only for seed.

### (f) Cotton

The most important money crop in the Nimar District at present is cotton. The growth of cotton increased enormously during the last quarter of the 19th century, since that time it has become stationary. At Captain Forsyth's Settlement in 1868 cotton covered an area of less than 35,000 acres, or about one tenth of the cropped area. In

1904 it amounted to 40 p.c. of the total area<sup>95</sup>). The area cultivated for cotton in 1931 amounted to 39 p.c. of the total<sup>96</sup>).

Before cotton became a money crop, only 10 to 12 seers of cotton seed were sown by each farmer. After the cotton picking the farmer called a Balahi weaver into the house who, in a shed near the house, cleaned the wool from the seed, spun the thread and wove the cloth for the members of the family. The Balahi weaver was paid his daily wages and received his food from his employer, while he worked. During the rest of the year he was employed as an occasional labourer.

For the cultivation of cotton a field requires careful preparation. It is ploughed either with the iron plough or the *hal*, after the dried stalks of the former crop have been removed by the harrow, or it is at least harrowed twice, the second time at right angles to the first.

Cotton is sown before all other crops. It takes the longest time to grow and demands much care. Sowing generally begins at the end of June. The seed (*kakhra*) is cleaned from wool and rubbish over the string-netting of a bedstead and then washed in diluted cow-dung or clay to lay the lint and so to prevent its sticking. In sowing the three-pronged *tiffan* is employed. Immediately after sowing the *dhandia* is drawn over the sown field — a weeding plough with a broad blade, which levels the ground and removes the weeds that have grown since the last harrowing. It also covers the seeds with soil.

When the seedlings are about 3 to 5 inches long, a *kolpa* weeding is given which is supplemented by a hand-weeding between the plants. At least two hand-weedings are required; the number of weedings vary with the season, the soil, and the means of the cultivator. *Kolpa* weeding does not begin before the plants show four leaves, lest they themselves be destroyed. A field generally requires at least one day of dry weather before *kolpa* weeding can begin, else the bullocks get their cloven hoofs clogged with earth and the blade of the *kolpa* gets stuck in the mud. If rain sometimes falls continuously for many days, the grass grows so high and strong that the *kolpi* (blade) merely slides over it without uprooting it. Then the cotton field must first be weeded by hand, at greatly increased expense. The *kolpa* will then be applied after the hand-weeding, for it heaps earth around the cotton stalks and thus closes the capillary tubes through which the fallen rain might evaporate.

The cotton is sown in lines about 18 inches apart and the plants are thinned out, about a span apart, to leave them sufficient space

<sup>95</sup>) Nimar District Gazetteer p. 97.

<sup>96</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part 1, p. 35.

to grow. In light soil, however, the farmers do not uproot any plants because a certain portion of them die of themselves in a dry season.

The cotton plants are very tender and will not grow except in a clean field. When in flower, the farmers fear clouds and cold winds which do much harm. The early pups are always in danger from untimely rain, while on the other hand delayed rain causes the wool to turn yellow, which lowers its price considerably.

Cotton picking (*kapas chunna*) begins early in November and lasts till January. It is started as early as possible, for the first cotton usually fetches a good price and the farmers are at that time of the year badly in need of money. Usually five pickings are made, at intervals of about one to two weeks. The second and the third pickings are most productive.

Cotton pickers are paid in cash or in cotton. The day's picking of each worker is divided into a number of portions previously agreed upon; the worker then is allowed to choose whichever portion he prefers. At other places fixed wages are paid. The latter method has only recently been introduced, and it has been adopted with the object of making it difficult to sell stolen cotton. For many thefts are committed at night in cotton fields; such cotton is sold to the merchants in small quantities by the thieves under the pretence of having earned it at pickings. If cotton pickers are paid in cash, only field owners can have cotton for sale. The usual wages for cotton pickers are one anna for each *passeri* (5 seers in weight) at the first picking, five *paisa* at the following pickings. The yield of the last picking is generally divided between pickers and owners.

Cotton picking is the work of women and children, men are rarely seen at it. The pickers begin work at about 8 or 9 a.m., and finish in the late afternoon. When the day's picking is over, each worker brings her bundle to the house of the owner for weighing. An able-bodied woman can pick upto eight *passeris* (a maund) of cotton, and thus earn about ten annas a day. But the average gathering seldom amounts to more than four or five *passeris*. When the bundle is weighed, the weight of the wrapping is deducted. Often the scales are tampered with so as to show less than the actual weight. The pickers usually dare not complain against such more or less common practices, but they often compensate themselves by hiding stones in their bundles to increase the weight of their picking.

The cotton stalks are left to dry on the field. Herds of cattle and goats feed on the green leaves of the plants till they dry up. Before the fields are prepared for the next monsoon sowing, the stalks are uprooted by means of the plough or the *bakhar*. They are collected in bundles by women and burned, or brought to the *kala* and stored there for use. The walls of many houses are made of a

wicker-work of cotton stalks, covered with a layer of cow-dung and mud. Mats of cotton stalks are used also for the side walls of the carts or as partitions in the cattle sheds, and also for making baskets.

#### (g) Paddy

Paddy is sown in well moisted fields as a first crop. It must be sown right at the beginning of the sowing season, because after repeated rains the field soil becomes too wet for sowing.

The growing crop often needs repeated hand-weeding, especially if the fields are too muddy for *kolpa* weeding.

Paddy is harvested in September or October, which is early enough to enable the farmer to clean his field and prepare it for the sowing of a spring crop.

The paddy is cut with the sickle by men or women. It is bound into sheaves which are left on the field for a few days to dry. The reapers, employed for the cutting, are paid in cash. If they prefer payment in kind, they must wait till the rice is husked. Then they receive two pounds of husked rice for a day's work. (These rates, usually, do not apply to war times. During the last war field labourers did not receive half the amount of grain which they used to get at ordinary times, due to the increased price of grain. Their daily wages did not increase at the same rate.)

After drying, the sheaves of paddy are collected and brought to the threshing floor where they are threshed by bullocks in the usual way. After threshing and winnowing, the grain (*sal*) is filled into bags or grain bins till the farmer's busy season is over. As soon as the owner finds leisure, he brings his grain to a mill for husking. Paddy is not husked in the ordinary way by hand pounders, for that would break the grain. There are small, steam or motor driven rice mills in many bazaar villages.

#### (h) Sesame (*til*)

*Til* or *tilli* (*Sesamum indicum*) is in point of area the third crop in the Nimar. Its popularity is largely due to the fact that it gives a good yield in newly cleared jungle land and, as cultivation is extending, it is much sown at present in land which ultimately will be given up to cotton or *joari*. It repays indifferent cultivation better than any other crop. The preparation of a field for the sowing of *til* is slight and a handful of seed is sufficient for an acre. Wild animals do not injure the crop until quite ripe.

The farmers sow two kinds of *tilli*, one black and the other white. The white variety fetches a higher price than the black or mixed *til*, though otherwise there is apparently no difference in size or in the oil-content of the grains. *Til* is grown on light soil and often

sown, after a heavy down-pour or a spell of dry weather has spoiled the sprouting crop of cotton or *urad*. In such a case the field is again harrowed and sown with *tilli*. It is sown in rows with the *tiffan* at the rate of one seer per acre. To secure equal distribution the seed is mixed with fine sand or dust. When the seedlings are about eight inches in height, the space between the rows is cleaned from weeds with the *kolpa* and the lines weeded by hand. The plants should be set at intervals of six inches.

*Tilli* is one of the first crops to be harvested. It is cut in October. The reaping is usually done by women who after cutting the stalks tie them at once in bundles which are brought to the *kala* where they are left to dry. When quite dry, the seed-containers open by themselves and when the bundles are now gently beaten against a post the seed pours out on the ground. After winnowing, the *tilli* is sold or occasionally brought to the Teli (oil-presser). The stalks are too brittle to be of any use, but they burn well and on cold nights people sit till late around a fire nourished with *tilli* stalks, the fires being rekindled early in the morning.

*Tilli* is much in demand for oil-production. Its waste-product (*khalli* — oil-cake) is a favourite food for water-buffaloes. *Tilli* is also eaten raw, or roasted in *gur* and *ghi*.

#### (i) Pulse (*tur*)

*Tur* or *tuar* (*Cajanus indicus*), a pulse, is grown along with cotton. After twelve or more rows of cotton, there follow two rows of *tur*. It partitions the field and keeps off the cold breeze harmful to the cotton. *Tur* ripens late in December—January. The stalks are cut, dried and then beaten on the ground till the grains fall out. After winnowing the pulse is pulped and then soaked in oil. It is believed that the *dal* of *tuar* is more quickly boiled if soaked in oil after pulping.

The stalks (*tur kathi*) are very useful for basket makers, for broom makers, and for building walls.

#### (j) Vernal crops

While the above described crops are all monsoon crops, sown at the beginning of the monsoon and harvested more or less shortly after it, the vernal crops are sown in November or December and harvested in March. The main vernal crops are wheat and gram; minor spring crops are *alsi* (*Linum usitatissimum* — linseed), *masur* (*Ervum lens* — lentil), *batla* (*Pisum sativum* — peas), *jau* (*Hordeum vulgare* — barley), *chaola* (*Dolichos sinensis* — Indian bean).

## (k) Wheat

Wheat can be grown only on black soil in low lying regions because there the soil is more retentive of moisture<sup>97</sup>). In years of low rainfall the wheat crop suffers most. It is sown in November with the drill plough (*nar*). The field is ploughed with the wooden plough as soon as it is cleared of the first crop, then harrowed. After that the sowing begins. While the ploughman draws the furrow which is to receive the seed, the sowing woman walks at his side and drops the seed into the drill cup. The furrows are only about six inches apart, and go in curves. (Only when ploughing with the iron plough do the farmers draw straight lines, but with the wooden plough they draw curved furrows, which look better than straight lines, as they say.) The plough, while opening a furrow for the seed, covers at the same time with soil the seed in the previous furrow.

At that time of the year, the sowing with the three-pronged *tiffan* would be impossible, for the seed-drills would soon get blocked with wet soil, and the bullocks would not be able to draw the heavy *tiffan* over a muddy field.

The sowing begins at the end of October and is carried on till the end of November. Two kinds of wheat are grown in the District, a hard red variety (*kathia*) which has to be watered, and the white *piSSI* which is sown in non-irrigated land. It is chiefly grown in the rich pockets of soil which lie at the foot of slopes. The farmers of the Nimar usually do not sow seed-grain reaped on their own fields; they say that wheat grows best if its seed is brought from places about fifty miles distant.

The crop must be guarded against wild animals and stray cattle day and night right from the start, especially in the last weeks before the harvest when other fields are already dry and grass is getting scarce.

A wheat field is not manured before sowing, and the crop does not need any weeding. The wheat is reaped in February or March; it is cut with sickles, tied in sheaves and carried to the *kala* where it is threshed and winnowed like other grain. The husks are fed to the cattle. Wheat husks are also mixed into the clay of which the earthen grain bins are built.

Paid reapers get their daily wages in cash or receive daily a sheaf or a *seer* of wheat. They are expected to cut about half an acre of the crop (one *bigha*) in a day.

<sup>97</sup>) In 1931 wheat occupied only 4 p. c. of the cultivated area in the Nimar District (Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, p. 35).

The most common pests which damage the wheat crop are field rats. Rust (*gerua*) is not uncommon in years when rain falls at a time when the ears are still green.

*Kathia* wheat can only be grown on fields which are irrigated by a well with plenty of water. Such fields are rarely owned by Balahis.

The water for irrigation is drawn from the well by means of a leather bag, the so-called *mot* (Fig. No. 15). The mouth of the *mot*

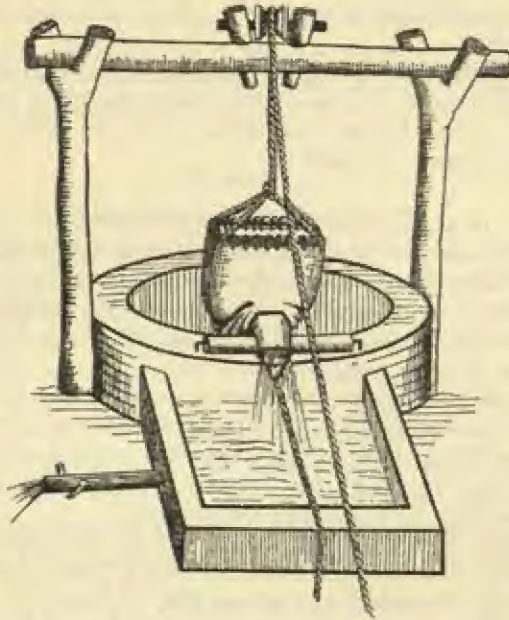


Fig. 15. Field-irrigation with the *mot* (leather-bag).

is fastened to a strong wooden frame which at its four corners is held by a rope or chain by means of which the *mot* is raised or lowered. The leather bag has the form of a bellows, with a long nozzle at the lower end to which another rope is tied. When the *mot* is dipped into the water, the nozzle is raised so that the water cannot escape by it. The bag is raised by a rope or chain which runs over a small wheel or wooden pulley, on a strong beam, held over the aperture of the well by two posts, firmly set in the ground near the brim of the well. Between and in front of the two posts there is a flat basin into which the water is emptied from the leather bag. When the bag is raised from the surface of the water, the tail of the lower end is

drawn over a wooden roller (at the edge of the basin) by pulling a rope attached to the end of the nozzle. The water pours from the aperture in the nozzle into the basin and is guided to the field in channels. As soon as the leather bag is empty, it is again lowered into the well by releasing the rope which runs over the pulley.

The *mot* is drawn by a pair of bullocks which pull the rope attached to the bag. The bullocks must be specially trained, for they must walk backwards when the rope is released. Strong animals are required for such work. In the hot season the path-way of the bullocks is covered with a roof of straw or of leaves, as a protection against the sun.

For the irrigation of a field two men are required: the bullock-driver who is also in charge of the proper working of the *mot*, and another man who directs the water into the field, opening one channel and closing another.

### (1) Gram (*Cicer arietinum*)

Gram (*channa*) is sown on soil which contains less moisture or is not clean enough for wheat. It is sown at the same time and in the same manner as wheat. Like it it has to be carefully guarded for three months before the harvest. Jungle animals and straying cattle are very fond of green *channa*.

Before *channa* begins to blossom, women go to the field and pluck the top-leaves off. This plucking makes the plants grow broader and increases the number of flowers. The women are paid nothing for the plucking, but they may take the leaves home and cook them as a popular dish with the dry *joari*-bread.

When ripe, the *channa* is pulled out by the roots and collected in heaps. Then it is brought to the threshing floor where it is spread out for drying. Threshed and winnowed, it is fed to the cattle, but more especially to horses. Before gram is fed to the animals it is soaked in water for about twelve hours.

Gram is much in demand by bakers of *bhutana* (parched gram) prepared according to a special process. It is sold everywhere in the bazaar and is a very popular confectionery.

Day-labourers employed for the harvesting of *channa* get two 'heaps' of *channa* for a day's work, the women one. If paid in cash, the men receive three or four annas, the women two or three as their daily wages.

### Rotation of Crops

The Balahi farmers, like other agriculturalists of the country, observe only a very elementary form of crop rotation. After a field has been ploughed with the iron plough, cotton is sown for two

consecutive years. In the third year *joari* or *urad* is sown. *Joari* should never be sown immediately after ploughing with the iron plough, for it is believed that the long *joari* stalks would get no proper hold in the loose soil after deep ploughing.

In lands suitable both for spring and for monsoon crops the farmers often sow a monsoon crop and a spring crop alternately. Though, as a general rule, cultivators avoid growing the same crop on a field for more than two consecutive years, they do not systematically practice crop rotation. They know also, at least vaguely, that after a crop of ground-nuts the soil becomes fertile for other crops, and that, the first time after breaking a new field, they may sow sesame with good results.

### Manure

Manuring is but little practised. The most common manures are the dung of cattle and village sweepings. Manure is allowed to lie and putrefy for about a year before it is brought to the field. In the Nimar many farmers burn the manure on the field itself and spread the ashes over the surface. They maintain that by burning the manure they keep the field clear of weeds the seeds of which are alive in the manure. They are ignorant of the fact that by oxydation the manure loses most of its strength.

The supply of cow-dung for manuring is small owing to its general use as fuel. Twenty-five cart-loads of cattle-dung are thought sufficient for manuring one *bigha* of land (1600 square yards). Fields are manured in the hot season, just before the rains begin.

Green manuring is unknown.

It is needless to say that Balahi farmers do not preserve their manure in pits. Cattle-dung and sweepings are piled up in a heap behind the house near the cattle shed. It would demand too much exertion to dig a pit for manure, even if the farmers were aware of the fact that fresh air and the sun reduce the value of the manure. Nor do they realise how much the open dung heaps and piles of garbage are responsible for the growth of vermin and infectious germs.

During the hot season the village herds are left free to roam in the fields and to feed on what little they can find. The fields are often manured only by the dung of these grazing animals. But often the cattle-dung is removed even from the fields and made into cakes for fuel.

## (2) Balahi Husbandry

## (a) Cattle

No farmer in the Nimar can cultivate his fields without at least one pair of bullocks.

But the bullocks which the Balahis possess are generally far from being the best specimens of their kind. Balahi farmers are rarely in the financial position to keep a pair of good beasts. If they have such a pair, they are soon compelled to sell them or to exchange them for a less good pair.

The cattle which the Balahis, like all the farmers of the Nimar, prefer to any other breed, is the Nimar breed of the humped domestic ox which is called Zebu. It appears that this breed, of a red or dark red colour, is best suited to the climate and kind of work required in the District. Very popular also are the animals of the Khargone breed, — speckled red and white, or black and white. For ploughing the Balahis prefer the large white Malwa bullocks. They are slow and lazy, but adapted to heavy work.

No special care is taken for the breeding of better cattle. Cows are allowed to run freely with the half-grown bulls of the whole village herd. No full-grown bull is kept for breeding purposes. A bull is castrated at about three years of age; people think that it would affect its growth if the operation were performed earlier. Bulls are castrated by crushing their testicles between two stones. Nowadays most of the farmers call the government-employed veterinary doctor to perform this operation and he does it in a more efficient and less cruel manner. For many animals die as a result of the primitive and unhygienic manner of castration. An animal's death results not only in financial loss, but also in the excommunication of the amateur vets from their caste and in a subsequent fine for their re-admittance. Thus the Nimar farmers much appreciate the service of the veterinary doctor who castrates their bulls free of charge.

After castration a bullock is allowed to run free for another year or at least six months. He is broken in at an age of three and a half or four years. Shortly before the young bullocks are put to the yoke, their nose is pierced. For this operation the animal's legs are tied carefully and its nose is held to the ground, while a man pierces the nose with the horn of a deer and at once draws a string (*nak*) through it to prevent its healing together. Then the animal is tied to a tree or post and kept there without food and water for two or three days. After this time the bullock is released without danger. The nose-string is tied in a knot behind the ears of the bullock.

As soon as the bullock is old enough to be broken in, a yoke is first laid on his neck. After he has got used to it, he is yoked with an old steady beast to a heavy log of timber, and soon to a light cart on a smooth road. The breaking-in of a young bullock is not without danger, but three or four young men are always ready to undertake it.

A bullock reaches his full strength and highest value in his fifth year, and retains his power for five or seven years. After that he is sold to a poor man. The age and strength of a bullock is judged according to his teeth. A bullock fetches a good price only when his teeth are sound and strong and their number complete. A missing or bad tooth reduces the price of a bullock for nearly fifty per cent.

The price of a pair of bullocks ranges generally between Rs. 50 and 200<sup>99</sup>). The best bullocks cost even more. Old bullocks are sold for Rs. 10 to 20 a piece. Their price, in general, rises and falls with the price of cotton. Bullocks are put to work as long as they can stand on their legs. When they sit down never to rise again they are left to die where they have fallen. A merciful owner may throw a bundle of grass to a dying bullock and give him to drink once, in the hope perhaps, that the animal may once again rise for further toil.

The staple food for bullocks and cows is grass which grows around the village. The cattle of the whole village is grazed by one or two herdsmen. Bullocks and cows in milk are fed the stalks of *joari*, the straw and chaff of wheat and rice (*sarki*) as well as *urad* or cotton seed during the ploughing and sowing season. But as soon as the green grass appears, feeding is stopped and only grass is given.

Cows are held sacred, and sometimes worshipped by Balahis. Not only on certain festivals (*Pola*), but also on other occasions, pious Balahis touch the back of a cow with folded hands and venerate it. The spot where a cow or bullock is tied to the post in the cattle-shed, is held sacred as well. Shoes are taken off when a Balahi approaches this particular place. Water which has been used for a religious ceremony, is poured out in the cattle-shed. Though they are venerated by the Balahis, it cannot be said that bullocks and cows are well fed or properly treated. Bullocks are often mercilessly worked to death, and cows when they are getting old are starved. Bullock drivers are often very cruel in goading their animals. They not only beat them, but twist their tails till they are broken at several

<sup>99</sup>) These are pre-war prices. During the last war cattle prices increased by four or five hundred per cent, and have ever since remained at this level.

joints, and prod them with the iron top of their stick till the blood runs down their hindlegs. Many Balahis are neglectful in watering or feeding their bullocks, even after a heavy day's work or a long journey.

Cows are milked by men. The milker approaches the cow from the right side of the animal and squats, when milking, right under the belly of the cow, looking at her hindlegs, and holding the milk-pot with his left hand while he is milking with his right. Before he starts milking, he allows the calf to drink a short while, but soon ties the calf to a post from where it cannot reach the teats. The Balahi usually milks only three teats, leaving the milk of the fourth for the calf to drink after milking. Cows are milked twice a day, morning and evening.

#### (b) Water-buffaloes

Only a few Balahis are wealthy enough to possess water-buffaloes. Buffalo-cows are kept for milk and *ghi* while the bulls are generally not allowed to grow. They are soon slaughtered and eaten or sacrificed on Dasahra and other feasts. A few bulls are kept for breeding or for ploughing, but as a rule not by Balahis.

A buffalo-cow costs between Rs. 250 and 500 (before the war Rs. 30—100). But the Balahis are rarely able to purchase a good buffalo and must be content with an animal that gives only a few *seers* of milk.

While buffalo cows are not slaughtered, there is no objection to killing the bulls. But buffalo-meat is only eaten by the Balahis when no beef is available.

#### (c) Goats

Few Balahis have a whole herd of goats. Some buy a single goat to have milk for a motherless baby, if they cannot afford to purchase a cow. The goats of the Nimar are of two varieties, *desi* and *barbari*, the latter gives upto two *seers* of milk a day, while the *desi* gives only half a *seer*. Goat's milk is considered very healthy for children.

Since goat's meat is very expensive (about three times as dear as beef), the Balahis can afford to eat it only on festive occasions. It is served at a marriage or funeral banquet when beef is out of question. Goats are the usual sacrificial animals in the worship of the clan gods.

#### (d) Horses

Only wealthy Balahis keep horses which are somewhat of a luxury since they are not used for work in the fields or for dragging carts. Only the *kotwal* needs a horse when age or sickness or bad

weather make it difficult for him to make his weekly trip to the police station or to obey the summons of a touring officer.

In former times Balahis were not permitted to ride a horse, or at least, they had to alight before they entered a village or when they met a high-caste man. Not so long ago I heard of several cases of Balahis who entering a village on horseback were dragged down from the horse and mercilessly beaten by Rajputs who considered it a personal affront that the Balahis did not alight from their horses when they passed them.

Balahis are not permitted by their caste rules to touch a dead horse or to eat horse meat. They therefore look down on the Mahars as an inferior caste because Mahars eat horse meat.

#### (e) Poultry

Only Balahis who live in jungle villages keep poultry because in other villages the Hindus object to keeping fowl. Moreover, there is not much chance of saving them long from dogs and cats, and other prowling animals, or from visiting officials who want to be supplied with chickens as long as there is a fowl in the village.

### Chapter XXXI

#### Other Occupations of the Nimar Balahis

##### (1) The Farm-Servant

The Balahis, who in their great majority are without landed property, form with other low castes the bulk of the farm-servants in the Nimar District. They, however, prefer occasional employment to permanent service though for financial reasons they are often forced to accept the latter. The Balahis like to be free and to work when and where they choose and rarely stay with one employer for more than a couple of years or even for several months. They also get higher wages for each working day if they are employed for occasional labour though in such employ they may not have work throughout the year. Moreover, the demand for permanent farm-servants is comparatively low since only wealthy land-holders have work to be done throughout the year. The average farmer employs farm-hands only for the seasons of sowing and harvesting, while at other times of the year he gets along without the help of paid servants.

##### (a) The Permanent Farm-Servant

The Balahis generally enter into a contract for permanent farm-service only when hard up for money or if they find it impossible

to get work as occasional labourers. A farm-hand who consents to serve for a month only, gets half his pay in advance, the rest after a fortnight or at the end of his service. If a Balahi is in need of a sum which surpasses a month's wages, he enters into a contract for as many months as are required to get the necessary money in advance. Generally only half of the wages is advanced when the contract is made, the other half is paid in small instalments during the time of service or in a lump sum at the end. The contract is oral if made for a few months only, it is written on stamped paper if it exceeds three months. A revenue stamp of one anna is required for a contract of three months' duration, a stamp of eight annas for a service of six months and over. The stamped paper, and the writing fee (of four annas) are charged on the servant who has to pay in cash.

If the servant has received a certain amount of money in advance this is mentioned in the contract. If a servant enters into a contract for six months, he may demand half of his whole pay in advance. But if the servant wants the whole of his yearly pay right at the beginning of his service, he is charged 25 per cent interest for the advance. The interest is not deducted from the pay, but the servant has to work it off after the conclusion of his term of service. A servant, consequently, who takes a year's pay in advance, has to work an additional six weeks for the interest only. The usual pay for a year's service amounts to Rs. 55 to 72, in the Ryotwari villages rarely more than Rs. 60.

To repay a loan of Rs. 100, a man has to work for three years. Holidays, days of sickness, compound interest, grain advances, have to be worked off after the three years of service. If Rs. 200 are advanced, the servant works for the interest only, while the loan remains untouched and must be repaid in cash. A man who has no other source of income will have to work for life without ever getting free of his debt. Boys work under the same conditions for half wages.

If, what often happens, a servant is forced during his service to take small extra advances in cash or grain, from 15 to 25 per cent interest is charged for these advances also. Moreover the employer usually demands a higher price for his grain which he gives in advance, at least ten per cent higher than the current market rate. If, for instance, a man could get four *chaukis*<sup>99)</sup> of *joari* for a rupee, his employer will give him only three and a half; if the rate is two *chaukis*, the employer charges a rupee for 1½ *chaukis*. Some employers refuse to give any cash-advances, and often even the regular wages

<sup>99)</sup> A *chauki* is four *seers*, a *seer* is a litre.

which a servant may justly claim in cash are paid in kind at a price fixed by the employer. The servants are forced to accept these conditions, else their payment is suspended or delayed indefinitely.

A Balahi servant, generally illiterate, makes every effort to remember the amount of the advances which he received during the time of his service. The employer makes notes in his account-book, if he can write, or else gets somebody to write it for him. At the end of his term the farm-servant is told how many days he has still to work, for his days of leave, and for the advances of grain and money granted to him during the time of his service. Usually the servant is surprised at the number of days he has still to work off, but this is not always due to the deceit of the employer — though a servant may sometimes be cheated of his well-deserved wages — but often the servant has just forgotten the exact amount of the advances received. Since he does not usually keep a written account, he cannot challenge the account given by his employer, and therefore must meekly agree to whatever the employer says.

Because this custom of paying in advance, in cash or kind, is very profitable to the employers, the latter often encourage their servants to take such small advances. Thus many servants are always in debt and have to serve for years to work off their debts which never appear to decrease. Cases are known where members of a family have worked for several generations to pay off the debts of an ancestor. If the interest of a loan exceeds the yearly payment of a servant, another member of the family may be taken into service. But this is rarely done nowadays, for land-lords and money-lenders are very reluctant to advance a large sum to anybody who has no landed property for mortgage. But it is still usual that one man of a family works to pay off the interest for a loan while the other members of the same family work for the support of the family and the repayment of the debt.

If a man has no relatives to help him in such circumstances, he finds it very difficult to pay off his debts even if he works for years for his creditor. In Bara Chegaon, for instance, a Balahi by name Balea, son of Jiwan, is working now for ten years for his creditor. His father borrowed Rs. 100 from his land-lord, and now, after ten years of service, the son still owes him Rs. 250! This debt has accumulated from the small advances and the high compound interest.

At Khandwa, before the last war, a Balahi borrowed Rs. 13 from a Mohammedan shop-keeper. He had to work for the man for five months (for a monthly pay of Rs. 3!). When the five months were over, his employer forced the Balahi to continue his service for the same pay, although the Balahi could have got employment at another

place for Rs. 6, and still better pay as a casual labourer, since the monsoon had started.

### Enforcement of a Contract

The enforcement of a service-contract depends much on the personality and the influence of the employer. A servant will not dare to break a contract if his employer is a powerful man. Even if a servant runs away, he cannot escape altogether: his master will force his relatives to pay back the advance given to him or to work in his place. The relatives, in turn, will put pressure on the run-away to repay his debt or to return to his service. Sometimes the village council forces a man to honour his contract. But if these more peaceful ways of procedure are of no avail, the employer may take recourse to the law.

There is little doubt that this system of employment for farm-service is a kind of bond-service or serfdom. The farm-servant gets half of his pay in advance in order that he may not leave his employer however badly he is treated. For even if a servant were able to return the money advanced to him, his master will not allow him to leave his service before the stipulated time. For, as the employer argues, the servant has received his loan under the condition of working off his debt, and therefore no employer is bound to accept any other form of repayment. The servant should fulfil his contract!

The Balahis, although they sometimes sigh and suffer under the harsh conditions of the present system of employment often prefer it to a life of independence. Some Balahis are the owners of a field, but unable to manage it they lease their own field and work as the servants of other cultivators. They prefer to be ordered about and to obey, than to be independent. Many Balahis would not work unless hunger and the order of their masters forced them.

Many poor people could never raise the required amount of money to pay the expenses of a wedding or a funeral unless, through the present system of employment, they could get their wages of a year or more in advance. These occasional festivities and banquets play an important part in the social life of a caste, and village life would indeed be boring and dreary without these breaks in the monotony, though the short hours of glory and gaiety must often be repaid with life-long drudgery and hard work.

### The Task of a Permanent Farm-Servant

A permanent farm-servant has to perform every kind of farm work which the different seasons of the year require. Besides his work on the field he has also to do all the odd jobs in the house and stable of his employer.

In the rainy season he has to appear for work early in the morning, when he feeds the cattle, gets ready the agricultural implements and tools for the day's work, and makes the necessary repairs. After a short pause during which he goes home for a light repast, he proceeds to the field where he works, with another break at noon, till late into the afternoon. When work ceases, he allows the bullocks to graze while he cuts grass for the cows and buffaloes. Even during the night he is supposed to get up and feed the working bullocks. During heavy rain-showers when field-work is impossible, the field-servant grazes the bullocks or repairs the agricultural tools, or is employed in making ropes. His master never allows him to remain idle.

A Balahi servant, however, cannot be employed by a high-caste farmer for milking the cows or fetching water from the well for the household. Such tasks must be left to servants from a higher caste. But there are always some odd jobs which even an untouchable Balahi can do to keep him busy so that he is rarely allowed to go home before late at night.

A field-servant's programme in the hot season is just a little different. Usually he is sent to the field early in the morning for ploughing or harrowing. There he works till noon, with short breaks during which he may drink water or smoke a pipe. At noon he is allowed to go home for lunch and a short rest. After two hours he again goes to the field and works till evening. After feeding the cattle and doing other necessary work he is free to go home for dinner. But he may be called again afterwards to watch the grain in the *kala* during the night. The permanent farm servant must be ready for work at any time of the day or night. Times of rest and repast are considered by his master as unwelcome, though necessary, breaks of his service. Often a farm servant is called to drive his employer in his bullock-cart to a distant village. He is lucky if he gets some leisure while his master enjoys his visit. During the time when he is away from home, attending to his employer, he gets his meals from the employer.

Balahi women are not employed as full-time farm-servants. They may be given regular work for a few hours of each day, to grind the *joari* or wheat or to clean the cow-shed. A woman who cleans the cattle shed is paid upto Rs. 2 per month. Flour-grinding is nowadays rarely done by servants; if the women of the house are unable to grind the daily ration for the family, the grain is generally taken to a mill of which there is at least one to be found in every market village.

Half-grown boys are often employed for grazing, or for cleaning the stable. They may also do light field-work.

Farm-servants do not get holidays. On Hindu feasts when their masters rest from heavy field-work, the farm-servants are kept busy with light work, watching the fields, or cutting grass for the cattle, weeding, grazing the bullocks, making ropes or repairing the agricultural implements. Even on such days a servant is not allowed to stay at home; although heavy work like ploughing is prohibited, he is kept busy with a hundred odd jobs saved up just for such days.

If the farm-servant takes a day's leave, with or without the permission of his employer, a day's wages are deducted at the end of the month, or he is ordered to work an additional day after he has finished the term of his service. During the busy seasons of sowing and harvesting no servant gets leave unless he provides a substitute whom he has to pay from his own pocket.

Field-servants who are the owners of a field sometimes stay away from their service to cultivate their own field, often to the great annoyance and disadvantage of their employer. However, most of the employers have to connive at such and similar liberties which field-servants take. They are usually humane enough to modify slightly the regulations of service which, as it is, are already harsh enough.

If a farm-servant falls sick, his wages are cut for the duration of his illness. This is very hard on the Balahi servants because they suffer much from malaria and other maladies. On an average every working man loses yearly about a month's wages through sickness. His difficulties are increased by the extra expenses which his sickness necessitates. Quite apart from the fact that he and his family want to eat also during his illness, he has extra-expenses for medicine or a better type of food or for a sacrifice which is recommended by the *barwa* for his speedy recovery. If the servant has not put by any savings, he is compelled to take another loan from his employer.

#### The Wages of a Permanent Farm-Servant

Before the war a full-grown man received a monthly pay of Rs. 5 or 6, and in the Ryotwari districts north and east of Khandwa seldom more, but often less, than Rs. 5. No extra remuneration is given, in kind or in cash, except for an occasional meal that Kunbi or Rajput employers give to their servants when the work is pressing. This they do that the servants may not go home for their meals and thus lose valuable time for work. But they do not provide a full meal; generally they give only one bread (of *joari* or wheat), "*adha pet*", as the Balahis call it — enough to fill half the stomach! On Hindu feasts like Holi, Pola, Dasahra, Diwali, etc., it is at some

places customary to give a meal to one's servants. Clothes are rarely given as presents to the servants, except perhaps old rags which a land-lord is ashamed to wear any longer.

Balahi women who clean the stable or collect the cow-dung, may get up to Rs. 2 per month. Boys who do field-work with the exception of ploughing, are paid Rs. 3 to 4, while those who graze the cattle or goats, get Rs. 3, only in exceptional cases Rs. 4. Their wages were about doubled during the war though prices rose proportionately much higher.

This extremely low pay of the farm-servants does not enable them to support a large family, and they are forced to send also wife, and children from early childhood, to work in the fields. No wonder that the Balahi servants are said to take secret compensation from the fields of their employer whenever they get a chance. Dire necessity often forces them either to steal or to starve! The consequence is that they become dishonest, and bad and lazy workers. Besides that, they are often under-nourished and physically unfit for heavy work. Their heart is not in their work, because they get so little for their toil!

The solution of the farm-servants' problem is rather difficult. Their predicament is caused by a whole complex of circumstances. At ordinary times the farmers suffer much from the low prices of their agricultural products, and consequently would work with a loss if they raised the wages of the agricultural servants. Further, their primitive and wasteful methods of cultivation increase the expenses of field-work so much that they can compete with the world market only if they lower the pay of their farm-servants. And as long as agricultural labourers are paid so miserably and are always on the verge of starvation, they must take money in advance to cover their extra expenses for a marriage or a funeral. Their financial position is so precarious that they practically never have any ready cash in the house and cannot save any surplus for extraordinary needs. The seriousness of the situation is intensified by the proverbial improvidence of the Balahis who yield too easily to the temptation of spending all their savings recklessly in times of plenty. They are a care-free, happy-go-lucky people, living for the present moment, forgetting the past and caring little for the future.

#### (b) The Casual Field Labourer

Many Balahis prefer casual field-labour to permanent farm-service. When they can get employment as casual labourers, they are usually paid higher wages than permanent servants. They are also more independent and can work when and how they like. They

can change their employer as often as they choose and can take a holiday whenever they feel like it. Besides, a permanent field-servant is himself not sure of permanent employment. He is often employed just for the rainy season and the following harvest time while he is told to stay at home when the work is more or less over. Many farmers dismiss their servants after the harvest and only take them on again when the rainy season approaches. During the months of unemployment the servants, of course, receive no wages. Thus the latter are in no better position during the lean months of the year than casual labourers. For this reason the Balahis often prefer casual labour, unless they are in need of a large sum of money which they can borrow only under the condition of serving.

The pay-rate for daily labourers depends much on the price of cotton. If the current rate of cotton is high, casual labourers may be paid as much as six annas a day. But the usual daily wage of an unskilled labourer was before the war rarely more than four annas. A casual labourer may earn more if he does piece-work. Women generally get half or two-third of a man's wages. During the hot season when work is scarce, and the casual labourers offer their services day after day in vain, the wages may go as low as  $1\frac{1}{4}$  annas for a man and nine pies for a woman. These are pre-war rates.

In the beginning of the monsoon the field-owners of a village come together and fix the rate for casual labourers of their village by mutual agreement. Afterwards no farmer is permitted to raise the wages without the consent of the others. The Balahis are thus compelled to work for the wages fixed by the cultivators. Even if in other villages higher wages are paid, they cannot leave their place and seek employment elsewhere. Their masters usually have already advanced money or grain to them during the hot season, thus they can justly demand that they first work for them. Moreover, people who have no landed property in a village can easily be expelled from its precincts by the *patel* if they make themselves unpopular. Thus such unruly labourers can effectively be punished by their masters as soon as they return home after a brief spell of work outside.

Luckily for agricultural labourers, the landholders themselves usually do not keep to their agreement. As soon as the demand for field labourers increases, especially at times when during short breaks in an excessive monsoon many hands are urgently needed to save the crops, the farmers outbid themselves in their desire to attract as many farm-hands as possible. Then the chance has come for the casual labourer! He goes to the highest bidder and works for him quite undisturbed by the fact that he has taken an advance also from several other farmers. But as soon as the pressure of work ceases, the wages for casual field-labour fall at once.

Day labourers who work for the job are able to earn decent wages during the harvesting and grass-cutting season. Of course, their earnings depend much upon their skill and strength but there are not a few who earn between eight annas and a rupee daily. However, these favourable conditions prevail only for a short time of the year, and during the lean months of the hot season many field-labourers really live on starvation rates. They can often afford only one meal a day and live on a diet of *mahua* blossoms and other low-grade food.

No social restrictions prevent the engagement of Balahis for any particular type of field-work, on the grounds of their low social status, except that in some cases members of certain castes will not work with Balahis at the same agricultural implement.

### (c) The Balahi Tenant

Such Balahis who possess a pair of bullocks but have no fields, may rent a field (*khot se*). An agreement is made with the owner of a field about its rent for a certain amount of money, payable after the harvest. Many money-lenders, merchants by profession, who have come into the possession of a field when a debtor failed to pay his dues, lease such fields to landless farmers.

Often the amount of the rent is not a fixed sum, but a certain percentage of the harvest. The usual rate is one half of the net gain. The field-owner gives his land and usually advances also half of the seed-grain, while the tenant supplies his own labour and that of his bullocks. The expenses of hired labour for weeding and harvesting are borne equally by the owner of the field and by his tenant. After the harvest, a proper account is made of all the expenses which are divided between land-lord and tenant, and the balance of all the field-products is made out. The land-owner gets half of the net gain, the tenant takes the other half. The land-tax, however, must be paid by the owner of the field. This kind of lease is called *batai*.

If the tenant pays all the expenses for seed-grain and hired labour, he usually receives two thirds of the net produce while the field-owner receives one third. The tenant pays his due either in kind from the grain which he has in his *kala*, or in cash after the sale of his crop. Even the husk after threshing is divided according to mutual agreement.

Sometimes the Balahis own a field, but have neither bullocks nor the necessary implements for cultivation. In such cases they lease their fields to tenants while they themselves take farm-service or work as casual labourers. When hired labour is required for their own field, they supply it themselves. Field-servants take leave from their

employer for a few days and work in their own fields in order to save the money which they would have to pay for the tilling of their fields.

## (2) Other Forms of Employment

Some Balahis have secured employment on the railway as porters and gangmen. They receive higher wages than agricultural labourers and have work throughout the year, but they often complain that this kind of work is too heavy for them. They are not used to continuous hard work, nor are they strong enough for it. Another difficulty is that they do not get leave whenever they want it. Balahis are accustomed to leave their work and to go off for a visit on the most untimely occasions and at the shortest notice or without informing their employer at all. They always find that something else is more important than just their present job. After a number of days they reappear and feel hurt when somebody else has taken their place in the meantime.

Other Balahis have found work in the cotton ginning factories, but this kind of employment is seasonal and lasts only for a few months of the year. It is heavy work, but in comparison with agricultural labour it is well paid. Before the war a male labourer was getting up to eight annas a day, a woman from four to six.

A favourite employment for Balahis is to act as watchmen (*chaukidar*), or as lower servants in a non-Hindu household where they may have to clean the house, the kitchen utensils, or act as errand-boys, dog-keepers, etc. Balahi servants are in general not well spoken of. Employers often complain that they are lazy, dishonest, unreliable. They never stay long at one place and change masters as often as their shirt.

In former times every high-caste man had the right to requisition the services of a Balahi for any odd job. When in the bazaar somebody wanted a coolie, the first oncoming Balahi was called to carry the load to whatever destination was required, without regard to the convenience of the Balahi. Probably from this custom derives the opinion that the name 'Balahi' comes from *bulana*, to call, since every Balahi had to obey the call of any petty official. Often enough the Balahi received nothing for his service. Nowadays every petty official, *patwari* (village accountant) or policeman, still can and does demand the service of the *kotwal*, but in the absence of the same any other Balahi may be ordered to serve. It is still the usual practice that such services must be given free of charge.

There are some Balahis who have been enterprising enough to learn a trade and now work as tailors, masons, or carpenters. But their work is generally only second-rate and not as highly paid as

that of the artisans who belong to the proper occupational castes. Most of the customers of such Balahi artisans are their own caste-fellows while other caste-members call them only when better-skilled artisans are either not available or too expensive.

Near Harsud there are several Balahi families who take contracts for the burning of bricks. They have been working with a Kumar (brick-layer) for some years, and have now established their own business. They are doing fairly well.

### (3) The *Kotwal*

Throughout the Nimar District the Balahis provide the village watchmen and official messengers. These men are called *kotwar* or *kotwal* (*kot* means: wall). In former times when each village was walled-in as a protection against bands of robbers and gangs of soldiers, it was the task of the village watchman to see that the gate remained closed during the night and that the wall around the village was not breached or climbed by dacoits. Today, the *kotwal* is still supposed to guard the village against thieves and robbers, to maintain peace and order, to report the arrival and departure of strangers to the police, to keep the birth and death registers up to date, to assist the *patel* (village headman) and the touring officials of the police and revenue departments in their various duties.

In former times maintained by and appointed for the service of the villagers, the *kotwals* are now to a certain extent Government servants. Due to this "exalted" position a *kotwal* often feels himself superior to ordinary Balahis and prefers to marry his children to the sons or daughters of another *kotwal*.

The office of a *kotwal* is hereditary, and a change is subject to the approval of the revenue department. A *kotwal* is removed from his office only for grave misdemeanour or on his own request. It appears that the government has been fortunate in the selection of its *kotwals*; throughout the Nimar District the *kotwals* are the most respectable and intelligent men of their community.

In Malguzari villages the *kotwal* is maintained by the field-owners: He gets four or five *chaukis* of *joari* from each farmer, and a sheaf of wheat from every owner of a wheat field. This payment is called *adha*. On the main Hindu feasts, as Rakhi, Diwali, Dasahra, Holi, Pola, and Jirota, the *kotwal* goes from house to house and collects small presents, usually a share of the festive dinner. On Dasahra he supplies the lemons for the sacrifice. The *patel* is supposed to present him on this day with a turban (*pagri*) or a *sela* (a piece of cloth 2½ to 3 yards long). Other villagers may give him their old outworn clothes, a shirt or a coat.

In the Ryotwari villages where the farmers are few and poor, the *kotwal* generally gets a salary from Government, about the fourth or eighth part of the village land revenue. In this district too he is supposed to skin dead cattle and to remove the carcass from the village precincts. In the Ryotwari villages the skin becomes his property, while in the Malguzari area the skin goes to the former owner of the beast, but a certain sum is given him for the skinning. The meat, however, and the bones are his property; he takes the choicest parts of the meat and leaves the rest to the other Balahis, and to the dogs and vultures. Everywhere it is precisely the *kotwal* who refuses to abandon the ancient Balahi custom of eating the meat of diseased and dead cattle.

In the northern and north-eastern parts of the District however, where the Balahis apparently have ceased to eat beef, the *kotwal* is not even allowed to skin cattle. He employs a Chamar for this task who yearly pays him a certain amount of money for the skins.

#### (4) Hunters and Fishermen

Hunting and fishing play a very subordinate role among the Balahis' various ways of procuring food-stuffs. They seem to have no arms of their own, neither spears nor bows and arrows. Formerly the *kotwals* were allowed to carry a spear with an iron spear-head, but this privilege has been abolished.

In villages near the forest the Balahis may hunt with nets, which are practical only for catching small deer, hares and rabbits. Generally the Balahis are poor hunters and do not catch much on their expeditions. But whatever may come into their bag, is divided equally between the hunters. Some Balahis have learned to hunt wild pigs with Banjara dogs. These dogs, trained by the Banjaras, a semi-aboriginal tribe of Central India, are very fierce and keep a wild pig at bay till the hunters arrive and kill it with an axe.

Since the Balahis do not hunt for sport, but for food, they do not spare female or young animals.

Birds are caught by means of traps which are put up on threshing floors and other opportune places. The trap consists of a wooden board or a bamboo mat, placed on the ground at an angle and held up at one side by a frail stick which falls at the slightest touch. The birds are enticed to go under the board by grains strewn about in the vicinity. As soon as a bird touches the stick which holds up the board, the latter falls upon it and holds it down by the weight of a heavy stone laid upon it.

But this setting of traps is more for the pleasure of half-grown boys than a serious method of hunting for food. Doves and pigeons, or partridge, are also hunted with a sling (*gulel*) but it is rare that

the boys ever hit a bird with a sling. If the Balahis ever were a hunting race, they have lost even the last trace of it. Boys also shoot birds with a so-called pellet bow, with a double bowstring of hemp fibre. With such a bow pebbles are shot instead of arrows. For shooting the pebble is being held in a piece of cloth fastened in the middle between both strings.

Balahis show more zest for fishing. At the beginning of the monsoon when the rivers and *nalas* are full of fish and crabs, they leave their field-work and go fishing. Even heavy rain-showers do not prevent them from going out and staying the whole day in the open. Small rivulets are frequently dammed and drained of the water till the fish can be caught with bare hands. Crabs are collected in flooded fields and brought home in baskets. At home fish as well as crabs are roasted and eaten with a dish of rice and *dal*, well spiced with *mirchi*.

In deep water the fishing line is applied, but only a few use it. Fish traps which the aboriginal tribes of the District hide in river dams, seem to be unknown among the Balahis.

Another method of catching fish is to wait patiently in a shallow passage of a river, armed with a stick. As soon as a fish passes, the stick is thrown or a blow is aimed at it which either stuns or kills it.

At other times a river or *nala* is dammed and the water of the pool thus formed is poisoned with the milk of *thurwar* (*Euphorbia tirucalli*), or the bark, root or fruit of *kumbhai* (*Careya arborea*). The fishes are stunned by the poison and are easily caught either with bare hands or in baskets.

Some Balahis, however, refrain from eating fish; they believe that leprosy is contracted by it.

## Chapter XXXII

### The Balahi Weaver

#### (1) Census of Weavers

According to the Census of India there were in 1931 only 246 Balahis in the Nimar District who still pursued the traditional caste occupation as their principal means of earning a livelihood. In addition to these, there were 32 weavers who had a subsidiary occupation, while 14 Balahis regarded their work at the hand-loom as a subsidiary occupation. In 1942, when I made a survey of the hand-loom still worked by Balahi weavers, the number of looms had decreased still more. Here follows the result of this survey:

Village:	Looms at work:	Looms idle:	Remarks:
Anlia	3	?	
Baghmar	1	cca 10	
Barur	5	cca 30	
Banderla	?	3	
Bhamangaon	12	?	4 of the 12 weavers work only 8 months of the year
Borgaon	2	25	
Burhanpur	3	?	
Chegaon	1	?	
Chindai	1	?	
Digris	1	?	
Doihar	3	—	
Haswara	2	10	
Jamli	7	5	
Jaswari	1	?	
Karkhi	1	—	
Khandwa	32	cca 5	10 of the 32 weavers work only 8 months of the year
Kharwa	3	?	
Khegaon	1	—	
Khirala	—	5	
Khunti	—	5	
Khudri	—	8	
Kondout	7	?	
Makerla	—	4	
Nagehun	2	—	
Pandhana	5	25	
Piplod	?	14	
Roshnai	2	5	
Rustumpur	—	12	
Shahpura	3	5	
Sehara	1	—	
Singot	1	—	
Sirpur	—	1	
Sirsood	2	—	
Songir	10	?	
Takli (Bara)	2	10	
Takli (Mori)	1	—	
Thembi	1	—	
Total	116	cca 182	

It was impossible to collect exact data of all the villages of the Nimar District; where the exact number of hand-looms could not be ascertained, this is indicated in the table.

From the geographical position of the villages in which hand-loom weaving is still practised it appears that most of the weaving

is done in villages around the towns and market places of the District, in and around Khandwa, Pandhana, Burhanpur.

The Balahi weavers of the Nimar are not organised, there is nobody to look after their interests. They suffer seriously through the exploitation of the yarn and cloth merchants who supply them with yarn and buy their products. The weavers are at the mercy of these merchants because they lack the necessary capital to carry on independently. Up to the war Balahi weavers were not admitted as members of the Government Cooperative Bank which is established at Khandwa for farmers. There is no Training School for weavers at Khandwa where apprentices could be taught improved methods of weaving and designing. Balahi weavers instruct their own boys as they grow up and show them how to work a loom, but this way of instruction excludes any possibility of improvement or change in the traditional method of weaving. The Mohammedan weavers at Burhanpur have been more progressive in their craft, many of them have small power-looms, but the Balahi weavers who could have learned advanced methods of weaving from them, generally had not the necessary capital to purchase such looms.

No wonder that the Balahi weavers are more and more compelled to abandon their looms and to seek their livelihood elsewhere. They cannot survive unless they considerably improve the quality of the cloth which they produce and perfect their methods of weaving.

In order to give a clear picture of the actual conditions of the weavers in the Nimar, a weaving centre at Bara-Awar, a sub-urb of Khandwa, has been selected for a more detailed study the results of which are given in the Appendix, pp. 440—441.

## (2) The Yarn

It is said that in olden days the Balahis were not only weavers, but also cotton carders and spinners. At present Balahis of the hill tracts in the Holkar State still card and spin cotton, but in the Nimar District of the Central Provinces they are engaged only in weaving. Occasionally they may spin a thread by means of the *takli*, a hand spindle of either metal or wood consisting of a short rod with a disk at one end. The spindle is spun by one hand while a sliver of cotton is held in the other. The *takli* can be used anywhere, and occasionally one meets people walking along the road and handling a *takli* at the same time.

No Balahi spins his own yarn with the spinning wheel (*charkha*) in spite of the wide propaganda made by the followers of Gandhi. They even refuse to weave hand-spun yarn because this is so difficult. The hand-spun thread is uneven and therefore easily gets stuck or torn in the heddles. The connecting of torn threads considerably

slows down work. Balahis asked why they refused to spin their own yarn, reply that spinning is not profitable. So far no Balahi could be found to take up spinning as a subsidiary occupation. They prefer to remain idle than to take up such unprofitable a task.

The yarn which is woven into cloth by most of the Balahi weavers is mill-spun yarn No. 6½. During the hot season when such coarse cloth as woven from yarn No. 6½ cannot profitably be sold, better skilled workers weave yarn No. 12½. A small number of weavers are able to weave even finer fabrics, but they complain that the sizing of the warp is too difficult if fine yarn is used. They either send their yarn to Burhanpur for sizing, or use thick yarn for the warp, while they make only the weft of fine yarn.

The yarn used by the Balahi weavers is plain and unbleached as supplied by the mills of Burhanpur, Akola, Ellichpur, and Indore. Dyed yarn which is required for the dyed hems of loin-cloth and *lagra* is sold by merchants at Burhanpur where yarn is dyed by a special process which guarantees fast colours. But more often the weavers themselves dye their own yarn with dyes which they purchase from the local dealers at Khandwa. These dyes soon fade or are washed out since the yarn is not dyed in grain.

Yarn is supplied, at Khandwa and Pandhana, by merchants (Bania and Bohra) who buy it whole-sale directly from the mill-agents. At ordinary times the price of yarn is controlled by the price of cotton, by the competition of the local dealers, and the amount demanded by the weavers. During the rainy season the price of yarn slowly rises until it reaches its culminating point in the cold season when it is about 25 per cent dearer than in the hot. From January onwards the price of yarn begins to fall quickly, because during the hot season there is not much demand for the coarse hand-woven cloth the Balahis produce.

The weavers are accustomed to take yarn on credit and to pay for it after a week, as soon as they have sold the cloth produced from the borrowed yarn. Only a few weavers are able to pay in cash when they purchase their yarn. If the merchants give the yarn on credit, they charge two annas interest per week for each bundle of yarn. If the average price of a bundle of yarn (at ordinary times) is Rs. 6, the weavers pay a yearly interest of 100 per cent for their yarn.

The merchants usually demand cash-payment after a week. Usually they are not prepared to accept cloth in place of money if the weavers have been unable to dispose of their products at the weekly market. At times when the demand for hand-woven cloth is small, the weavers are compelled to reduce the price of their cloth considerably in order to get rid of it. Only when they can sell their

products, are they able to pay for the yarn which has been advanced by the merchant in the previous week. And only after they have paid their debt of the past week, are they supplied with new yarn. Practically all weavers pay for their yarn in cash, as it appears. But the initial debt which has been incurred by the purchase of the first bundles bought, stands with the heavy interest of two annas per bundle per week. The merchants have arranged these loans in such a subtle way that the Balahis do not recognise the real state of things; they do not mind paying two annas for the loan of a bundle of yarn, though they would refuse to pay 100 p. c. interest (to which the two annas actually amount in the course of the year!).

When the market price of hand-woven cloth has reached its lowest point, the time has come for the cloth dealers to buy it in large numbers. If the weavers have found no purchaser in the market, the dealers accept it in exchange for yarn at a rate below even the reduced current market price.

Sometimes a cloth-merchant employs weavers, advances them the yarn and pays them fixed wages for the cloth which they produce for him. But the permanent employment of weavers and the payment of a fixed rate for their labour is often found unprofitable by the merchants; because the Balahis are not beyond dishonest dealings. They either try to save some yarn by loose weaving, or weave carelessly and thus produce cloth of inferior quality, well knowing that their employer will have to accept even badly woven cloth, since he has advanced the yarn and often also paid part of the wages.

On the whole, however, it seems that the trading with yarn is very lucrative for the merchants, in spite of occasional losses. It is maintained by Balahis that several yarn merchants have greatly enriched themselves in a few years by supplying yarn to the Balahi weavers. Apart from the high interest which they charge for the weekly advance of the yarn, they profit mainly by the seasonal fluctuation of the yarn-price. They purchase the yarn wholesale at a time when it is cheapest, and sell it with great profit in the cold season when all looms work full-time and the demand is considerable. Owing to lack of initial capital and the absence of an organisation, the Balahis are unable to take the same advantage of the seasonal fluctuation of the yarn-price nor can they purchase all the yarn they require for a whole year in advance, at more favourable prices, and without the services of middle-men who now make a huge profit.

### (3) The Process of Weaving

The hand-loom which is used by the Balahi weavers, and their methods of weaving, are much the same as in other regions of India. The primitive implements and tools of the weavers, unchanged for

many generations, cost all in all no more than a few rupees. The frame of the hand-loom is made locally by carpenters, Balahis or others. The more intricate tools, as the shuttle and the pressing comb, are bought at Burhanpur where such implements are made, or where they are available for sale in a large variety.

Each Balahi weaver works in his own house and at his own loom. It seems that looms are sufficiently available, but lack of space in the crowded Balahi quarters makes it often difficult to put them up. Thus, in many houses, two weavers work at one loom, taking it in turns. While one man works during the day, the other weaves at night.

A bundle of yarn (*sut ka purya*) consists of a certain number of hanks (*gundhi*) which are again divided into small coils (*lathi*). Each bundle of ten pounds of yarn contains twice as many hanks as the number of the yarn indicates, thus the length of thread in each hank of any type of yarn always remains the same. A bundle of yarn No. 6½, for instance, contains 13 *gundhi* and each *gundhi* 5 *lathi*. For the production of one piece of cloth (*than*) of 20 cubit's (*hath*) length 2 *gundhi* and 4 *lathi* of yarn are required for the warp (*pajni*) and 2 *gundhi* 3 *lathi* for the woof. If the *than* is different from this standard size or if thinner yarn is woven, the amount of yarn will also differ.

In order to prepare the yarn for the weft, the *lathi* is opened and hung around a wooden wheel (*charkha*), about a foot in diameter. This wheel is connected by a string with an iron rod on which the *pali* (reel) is set. The yarn is wound from the wooden wheel onto the reels by rotating another wheel connected with the iron rod on which the reel rests. The reels are of wood, hollow, with a notch at one end around which the end of the thread is wound by hand to prevent it from slipping. The reels are replaced by others as soon as they are wound with the required length of yarn. This preparatory work is done by women or children.

### Warping

For the warp the yarn has to be arranged in a sufficient number of threads all of the same length. This is done in the following way: The yarn for the warp is first wound on a frame of wooden sticks, not unlike the frame of an umbrella. It is called *pareita*. Through the centre of the frame i. e. at the junction of the supporting cross-sticks, passes a thin iron or wooden rod around which the *pareita* rotates during the winding of the thread.

Next four iron pegs are driven into the ground in the courtyard or before the house of the weaver so that they form an irregular square. The woman who winds the yarn for the warp holds

the *pareita* in her left hand while with her right hand she draws the thread around the four pegs set in the ground round about her. For this she uses a stick with an iron hook at the top. The woman turns from peg to peg in such way that the required length of 18 or 20 cubits for the layer of threads is achieved.

The yarn is now taken off the pegs and put into a huge pot filled with starch water. A kind of bread is made of *joari* flour which is broken into crumbs and allowed to soak in water for a day. Then the bread is squeezed out and the liquid strained through a cloth. It is then ready for use. A *chauki* of *joari* is required for 12 *thans* of cloth. The yarn is soaked for a day or two to make it tough for the weaving. After it has been taken from its starch bath, it is dried in the open air on a system of cross-wise connected sticks stuck in the ground at such intervals as may be needed to support the warp. The warp threads are kept at proper length by attaching the sticks on which they are wound to pegs firmly driven into the ground. Then the warp threads are disentangled and kept apart by spreading them at a proper distance from each other on the sticks. This done, the warp is brushed with a broad flat brush, made of the roots of *khas* grass (*Andropogon muricatus*). The threads are thus cleaned from dirt and made smooth and even. Broken threads are mended by twisting the loose ends together.

Then the whole warp is wound around the stick while its loose ends are cut even and each thread, one after the other, is passed through a loop in the heddles and the pressing comb, and is tied to the weaving beam. To save time and much tedious labour, a sufficient length of warp threads from a former sizing, already mounted on heddles and pressing comb, is left over and the threads of the new warp are simply tied to the ends of the former one.

Two heddles (*phani*) are required for each warp, one half of the threads passing alternately through the loops of one heddle, the other half through the loops of the other. A heddle consists of two equally long bamboo sticks between which the reeds are fastened by cotton strings. The reeds are of *shisham* wood (*Dalbergia latifolia*) and split, four inches long, an eighth of an inch broad and half as thick. The cloth is woven tightly or loosely according to the space between the reeds. For thick yarn more space is needed than for thin. Sometimes two threads are taken simultaneously through both loops of the heddles. If warp and weft consist of a doubled thread, the cloth thus woven is called *dosuti*, if only the warp is double-threaded, it is called *deph-suti*.

The length of the heddles and the pressing comb (*rachh*) gives the width of the woven cloth. If cloth of a different width is to be woven, heddles of a different size are used. The widest cloth woven

by Balahi weavers is about 3 cubits (24 *gira* — hand-breadths). The usual width of the *dongra* (woven from yarn No. 6½) is 12 to 15 *gira*, that of the Korku *dhori* (woven from yarn No. 12½ and thinner) is 18 to 20 *gira*.

The actual weaving is done by men. The loom (*hafa* or *katkat*) is always under cover, for its wooden frame would soon become bent and out of shape if it were to get wet in rain or dew. The shed or veranda where the weaver works is called *karkhana*. The loom is set on a frame of four strong wooden posts with cross beams connecting two posts on each side; it is placed in such a way that it can easily be moved to and fro, but not sideways. The weaver sits on the edge of a square hole dug under the hand-loom and stretches his legs towards the farther end of the hole.

The loom-frame (*sancha*) consists of two vertical flat beams which are connected by two horizontal beams, one at the lower ends and the other about two-thirds of the way up. This upper cross-beam reaches on both sides beyond the vertical side beams and rests with its ends on the side beams of the supporting frame. The beam which connects the bottom ends of the vertical beams contains the channel in which the shuttle moves. Over this beam is inserted a ledge which can be moved up and down between the vertical beams. It prevents the wooden roller behind the pressing comb from slipping and keeps the warp even and in order during the weaving.

The shuttle which the Balahis now use is English-made and has the form of a canoe with an iron top at both ends. Its inner side contains an iron pin one end of which can be lifted to slip on the reel (*nali*) on which the weft yarn is wound. The shuttle is called *dhota*. At one side of the shuttle there is a hole through which the thread from the reel is passed. To reduce friction there is a smooth glass bead set in the hole through which the thread is drawn. Every time a new reel is put into the shuttle, the iron pin is oiled to allow an easy rotation of the reel.

In times past the shuttle was pushed across the warp by hand. The Balahis say that the old method of weaving was not slower than the new with the fly-shuttle, but it was more difficult because the weaver had no hand free for pressing down the comb or turning the roller around the woven cloth. Today most of the Balahi weavers use the fly-shuttle which can be worked with one hand while the other is free for pressing down the comb or turning the roller.

Nowadays the shuttle is passed across the warp by an intricate arrangement of strings hanging from a cross-beam in front of the weaver. The ends of these strings are connected with square pieces of wood which, by a pull first at one side and then at the other,

push the shuttle across the warp. The strings are pulled by means of a handle which is held in the right hand.

From another cross-beam is suspended the pressing comb (*rachh*) which, after the shuttle has passed across the warp, is pulled towards the weaver with the left hand and thus pushes the woven thread close to the weft. The *rachh*, like the heddles, consists of two ledges between which a great number of thin flat reeds are tied by strings the thickness of which gives the exact intervals between the reeds. The pressing comb, though similar in construction to the heddles, is heavier. Sometimes its reeds are of steel, but the Balahis prefer such of *shisham* wood because the latter are more flexible and do not cut the thread as often as the steel reeds do. This instrument as well as the heddles are made by Mohammedan artisans at Burhanpur, but a few Balahis at Khandwa can also make them.

Another rather intricate arrangement is required for the proper working of the heddles which alternately raise or lower the threads of the warp when the shuttle passes between them. The heddles (warp-adjusting combs) are connected with pulleys suspended from a cross-beam over the loom. They are worked by means of strings which pass into the hole in the floor where the weaver puts his feet. Each end of the two strings is attached to an inverted half of a coconut shell pierced in the centre. The weaver holds the coconut shells with his toes. Pulling alternately one string with the right and the other with the left foot, he raises either one or the other heddle.

Thus one series of threads passing through one comb is raised while the other series passing through the other comb is pressed down so as to make space for the passing of the shuttle. After the shuttle has been driven across, the position of the heddles is changed before the shuttle returns.

The whole length of the warp is spread out horizontally. If sufficient space is not available in the working room, the ends of the warp are rolled up and tied in a knot. The warp is kept taut by a rope tied around a peg at the extreme end of the room. From this peg the rope goes up to the roof beams of the shed and is passed back to the weaver who thus can lengthen the warp when necessary without leaving his place.

To keep the warp spread to its proper breadth, two cross-sticks are laid over it, held taut by strings or wire. The ends of the sticks are inserted in the selvages of the cloth and kept in such a position that the distance between them is that of the full breadth of the cloth. At intervals these sticks must be readjusted when the woven cloth is rolled up on the wooden beam behind which the weaver sits.

The woven cloth is wrapped tightly around the beam behind the frame of the loom. To tighten the warp more effectively the wood-work of the beam is slit and sticks of bamboo are inserted in the slits to increase the circumference of the wooden beam. The roller is supported at both ends by wooden posts and held fast at one side by a pin to prevent it from turning back and loosening the tension of the warp.

It usually takes a weaver a full day to weave a cloth of 20 *haths*' length. For the thinner kind of cloth a Balahi weaver requires two days weaving. As at ordinary times the net profit for the weaving of a *dongra* (coarse cloth of 20 cubits' length) is only eight annas (before the war!) a weaver earns no more than an unskilled farm-hand, for not only the actual weaving, but also the winding of the spools for the weft and the sizing of the warp must be taken into account.

### The Cloth

Out of one bundle of yarn No. 6½ (ten pounds) the Balahis weave 2½ to 3 *thans* of the coarse country cloth (*dongra*) which is still preferred to mill-cloth by the more conservative peasants of the District and by the aboriginals. Shirts and coats of this type of cloth are very common in the villages, especially during the cold season. One piece of cloth as the Balahis weave it, is from 2¼ to 2½ feet in breadth and 9 to 11 yards in length. The price of the cloth depends on its quality as well as on the price of yarn. The usual profit made by the weaver from each cloth is from six to ten annas. Since the preparation of the yarn for the weaving and the weaving itself is almost a day's work for two persons, a Balahi weaver's wages are scarcely higher than that of an unskilled labourer.

Cloth woven from yarn No. 12¼, 14¼, etc. is purchased by customers for shirts, but especially by the aboriginal Korkus who wear *dhotti* (loincloth) and *lugra* (main female garment) of this type of cloth. A piece of this finer cloth is 3¼ to 3¾ feet broad and 9 to 11 yards long. Since the weaving of this cloth requires more time and labour, the weaver earns from twelve annas to a rupee for each piece. From one bundle of yarn No. 12¼ the weaver can produce three *thans*.

The price of the coarse cloth, 10 yards long and 2½ ft. broad, is in normal times Rs. 2/12 to 3/4, while the *dhotti* cloth, 10 yards long and 3¼ ft. broad, is sold for Rs. 3/4 to 3/12, the prices varying according to the quality of the weaving and the demand on the market.

The cloth is usually sold by the weavers themselves at the weekly bazaar at Khandwa or at other places in the District. It is purchased

either by the consumers or by hawkers, Balahis and others, who go from village to village and sell it at a small profit. Some of the coarse type is also exported to the adjoining villages of the Holkar State, west and north of Khandwa. The thinner type is bought with preference by the aboriginal Korkus who live in the east and north-east of the Nimar and come to the weekly markets to sell timber.

The coarse cloth is much in demand just before the beginning of the monsoon when the peasants purchase their supplies for the rainy season, but more so in the cold season after the harvest, when warm coats and shirts are needed and the necessary cash is at hand for the purchase of cloth. When, however, the crops fail, the weavers also suffer much from the reduced purchasing power of the farmers. In the rainy season, and particularly during the hot period, the coarse cloth is sold with difficulty. The weavers, therefore, are obliged to reduce the price, i. e. the wages for their labour (since the control of the price of yarn is not in their hands), or to give up weaving altogether during this unfavourable period. They then work as daily labourers in the fields or as coolies in the town and market places. Better skilled weavers weave the thinner type of cloth during the hot season and thus are able to keep working throughout the year, with scarcely a decrease of their output.

## Chapter XXXIII

### Financial Status of the Balahis

The general poverty of the Balahis has different reasons: bad seasons for the farmers, low wages and unemployment for farm-hands and servants, extravagant expenditure on weddings and funeral feasts, general improvidence and indolence, and exploitation by money-lenders.

The average Balahi farmer has only a small field. Assuming even a good year with a good crop, he does not make very much profit. His primitive and negligent way of farming further reduces the chances of a rich return. Then, the expenses for cultivation are high: the traditional primitive method of agriculture makes it necessary to employ a number of daily labourers for urgent work in the few days of fair weather during the monsoon. The farmer, therefore, needs a lot of ready cash to carry on his field-work at a time when his savings are already at the lowest ebb. He therefore is compelled to borrow money from the money-lender (*sahukar*).

A year of failure of the harvest leaves the Balahi farmer generally on the verge of starvation. But even if he manages to keep himself and his family alive until the next harvest, he may have no

seed-grain when the sowing season arrives. Again, there is only one way out of the difficulty: he must borrow from the village banker.

The Balahi has to pay a high sum in cash periodically for his caste feasts as is also the case when his children marry, or some one in the family dies, or if he has offended against the caste laws and has to pay a fine as punishment. Such expenditure cannot be postponed to a more convenient date; if the Balahi has no funds from which to draw for such exigencies, he must borrow the necessary amount of money from the money-lender.

Moreover, the Balahi is often sick. He or a member of his family needs medicine. At least the *barua* is called and insists upon an offering. During the days of sickness the Balahi earns nothing, but he has more expenses than usual. A poor man without any savings is thus necessarily compelled to borrow.

The Census of India 1931 gives a fairly accurate description of the financial position of the average farmer in the Central Provinces. If one remembers that the Balahi farmer belongs to the underprivileged class of population in the country, in a District which as such is already below the average of the Districts in the Central Provinces, it is clear that the account given in the Census for the average farmer is too high for the Balahi. Here follows the Census Report:

"After a full appreciation of the position of the different grades of agriculturists the Committee has summed up the economic position of the hypothetical average cultivator as follows:

"The provincial average produces the following figures for the average cultivator:

	In a normal year:	When crop is 25% below normal:
Size of holding:	Acrees 21	.....
	Rs.	Rs.
Value of gross crop outturn after deducting marketing expenses . . . . .	491	369
Income from subsidiary sources . . . . .	50	50
Total income . . . . .	541	419
Cost of maintenance & clothing . . . . .	214	214
Cultivating expenses . . . . .	157	157
Rent . . . . .	21	21
Total necessary expenses . . . . .	392	392
Balance . . . . .	149	27

Out of the balance the cultivator has to incur other expenditure. He will spend certain sums on marriages and funerals, etc., on repair of his house, on journeys, on repayment of debts and on interest charges if he has borrowed money, possibly on the education of his children, and on whatever little luxuries such as pan, tobacco, etc., etc., he is able to afford. The provincial census shows an average of three surviving children to the average parent. This implies at least three marriages per generation or about one marriage every seven years. These marriages may come in close succession if the difference in the children's ages is slight. There will also be periodical funerals. Some cultivators put by some savings towards these expenses, while others raise money by sale of cattle, but many take loans for these ceremonies. The average total expenditure involved on these ceremonies will be equivalent to not less than Rs. 40 per annum as is explained hereafter: in many cases it will be far more. But it is clear that the margin after these and other similar charges have been met is small, even in a normal year; while when a crop falls to 25 per cent below normal there is practically no surplus for meeting any expenses beyond those of maintenance, cultivation and rent, while in many cases there is a deficit...<sup>100</sup>).

It must also be borne in mind that the Balahi, even if he has earned money enough to carry him through a year, does not put it on a saving's account, but, very foolishly perhaps, spends it as soon as he earns it. The average Balahi does not plan ahead for the future. He lives for the moment. Money simply does not stick to him; he doesn't feel well until he has spent it somehow. A Balahi who unexpectedly comes into money, will certainly soon do away with it, by buying useless things, by getting cheated hopelessly or by gambling it away. Or else he will give a big banquet to his caste fellows. Of course, there are also thrifty and hard-working Balahis, but they certainly are rare.

Indeed, the temptation to mortgage the future for present comfort is great. His whole economic system is based upon credit, he simply borrows everything. It is the custom among the Balahis to take a field on credit and to manage it with bullocks and agricultural tools which are either borrowed or bought with money loaned from somebody else. Scarcely any field-servant begins work without advance of wages, daily labourers have often eaten up the grain which is advanced instead of wages, long before they have worked for it. Balahi weavers always take in advance the yarn which they weave into coarse country cloth. Weddings, funeral banquets and caste dinners, are made possible only by borrowing; litigation and

<sup>100</sup>) Census of India 1931, vol. XII, part I, p. 60.

court suits simply drown the Balahis in debts, but they continue to borrow, regardless of the rate of interest charged. To bother about the chances of repaying debts or about future needs, is not one of their characteristics. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry — *Khao, pio, khush raho!*" is the most popular motto of the Balahis.

No wonder therefore that most of the Balahi farmers and many of the servants and labourers are constantly in debt. That the latter are less in debt than field-owners is due only to the fact that money-lenders are reluctant to lend them anything since they have nothing to offer for security. This chronic indebtedness is certainly one of the main reasons for the bad financial position of the Balahis in general. For anyone who borrows from an Indian money-lender has little chance of ever getting out of debt again. People justly compare the money-lenders to vultures: once they have someone in their clutches, they never release him. Because of the high interest, and of various tricks, practiced by the money-lenders, the debtor is invariably the loser in his struggle for deliverance from the *sahukar*.

A great deal is said to excuse the high rates of interest which the money-lenders charge. It is said that the *sahukar* takes a heavy risk and must charge high rates of interest to cover possible losses. But these losses though they may indeed often occur are nevertheless mostly imaginary. For money-lenders observe one strict rule: they exact very conscientiously the yearly interest. If thus the usual interest of 25 per cent is exacted for four consecutive years, the borrowed sum is already returned. Some debtors in fact pay this high interest not for four, but for ten and more years, till at last they are able to repay the whole debt with compound interest. And even if a debtor after years of paying high interest becomes disheartened and stops payment altogether, the *sahukar* has already been amply repaid.

But the money-lenders have still other tricks up their sleeves. They often lend money only under the condition that repayment is made in cotton. If the price of a maund of cotton is, say, about Rs. 6, the money-lender offers about Rs. 4 for a maund. The agreement is signed when the debtor gets his loan, usually at a time when cotton fetches no price. Thus the borrowing farmer is easily persuaded to mortgage his cotton crop at such low a price, the more so as he is anxious to get his loan. But, the money-lender often imposes still another condition: in case the farmer is unable to repay his debt, or at least to pay his interest, in cotton, he must pay in cash the price of the equivalent amount of cotton at the current market rate! If, for instance, the actual market price is Rs. 6 for a maund of cotton, a debtor who has agreed to pay his interest in cotton, but

cannot do so, is compelled to pay an interest 50 per cent higher than the usual rate.

For instance: In 1939 a Balahi in Pandhana borrowed Rs. 60 from a Bania. When he took the loan, the Balahi agreed to pay for each rupee borrowed a *passeri* (10 pounds) of cotton as interest. Now it happened that the cotton price took a sharp rise in 1939: the market price was Rs. 10 for a maund, or Rs. 1/4 for a *passeri*. Thus the Balahi had to pay for his loan of Rs. 60, Rs. 63/12 in interest only! As the payment of the interest was exacted six months after the loan was given, the interest amounted really to more than 200 per cent!

Another money-lender demanded only half a *passeri* of cotton as interest for each rupee given in loan, but the debtor had to pay back already after four months!

Another *sahukar*, a forest contractor, demands as his usual rate of interest 100 per cent, payable after six months. But he lends only small sums.

Such instances could be repeated almost *ad infinitum*.

Contracts are made in such a way that recurrence to law is scarcely ever possible. For a given loan bonds are written which already include the yearly interest. Thus for an actual loan of Rs. 100, Rs. 125 are always written on the paper signed by the debtor. Sometimes a much higher amount is written and signed as a mere threat to ensure punctual repayment. But there is no security that for the actual loan the amount written on the promissory note will not be extorted on the day of repayment. Sometimes the debtor is made to sign a written statement to the effect that in case of failure to pay his debts or the yearly interest, he agrees to be fined a certain amount of money for each consecutive week or month!

While the usual interest for a loan in the Nimar amounts to twenty-five per cent for sums up to a few hundred rupees, the interest for seed grain is never less than fifty, often a full hundred per cent! The poor farmers are glad to get a loan of seed grain even at such exorbitant interest, because they realise that their loss would be still higher if they could not sow their field for lack of seed. Also, the loan generally amounts to a few rupees only and consequently the heavy rate of interest is not felt so severely. The moneylender, however, who lends small sums to many debtors at this high rate of interest, accumulates a huge profit.

It is true that not only the Balahis, but all small debtors are charged these heavy rates of interest. But the Balahis are perhaps more than other castes affected by this exorbitant state of affairs, since they are more inclined than others to take such loans. They are really incorrigible borrowers and cheerfully risk their whole

future for the needs of the moment. In their optimism and improvidence they are always confident that luck will somehow help them out of their troubles, either by letting the *sahukar* die, or by giving some or the other opportunity of evading repayment of a debt. The money-lender, for his part, cheerfully plays up to this reckless habit and even encourages it, knowing fully well that ultimately the debtor will have to pay heavily for his present extravagance by life-long serfdom and debt.

It is, however, no easy job to recover a loan from a Balahi debtor. At harvest time when the money-lender goes round to collect his interest or to demand repayment, the Balahi always tries to evade paying up. Either he sells his crop secretly and pretends that it has failed, or he hides his money and swears by all the gods, and by the life of his children, that he is penniless and couldn't possibly pay anything. But the *sahukar* knows all these tricks and is fully aware that a delay in repayment of a debt is the usual thing. What he insists upon however is the regular payment of the yearly interest. This is his principal source of income. The debt may remain, to be paid with heavy interest the next year, to be never paid at all, but the annual interest must be promptly handed over each year. Then of course a loan is a well-paying investment. After years when the Balahi has been white-bled and is so impoverished that nothing can be squeezed out of him anymore, the money-lender is ready for a compromise: He declares himself content with a part of the accumulated debt if it is paid at once, either in cash or in kind. Most of the debtors are willing to accept such an offer and to part even with their last bullock to silence an inconvenient creditor. But a money-lender will take his debtor's bullocks or field only as a last resort, for as long as he can keep his debtor going on paying year for year twenty-five per cent and more interest for his loan he will not deprive himself of his main source of income. He will even give him small additional loans to keep him solvent for another year. No money-lender is anxious to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

The money-lender seldom takes recourse to court. The reason is that he does not want too much publicity for his shady transactions. Also, a debtor who postpones payment until the creditor actually goes to court, is generally already in a desperate position in which he really cannot pay anything at all. Thus the expenses of a court case would ultimately fall to the *sahukar* who nevertheless would be unable to recover his loan. If a money-lender knows that one of his debtors is in a position to pay, but refuses to do so, he sometimes has recourse to force or intimidation: he employs a Mohammedan lad who is willing to beat the unwilling debtor or

to discredit him in some other way. Generally the mere threat of sending such a man is sufficient to make a debtor pay up.

All this goes to show that it is mainly due to the Balahis' unfortunate habit of borrowing and of living and working on credit that they have lost so much of their landed property and are in so desperate economic circumstances.

They can entertain but little hope that things will ever improve. The small farmers and field-labourers to which class most of the Balahis belong can never rise above their condition of labouring chattel unless the general conditions of agricultural labour improve considerably. All the advantages which their productive labour creates go either to the owners of their land, or more often, to the merchants and dealers who buy and sell their products with profit to themselves. No matter how much they exert themselves, they have no real profit from their labour. All that could better their lot, give them leisure, and opportunity for education and progress, is barred to them. The result is that the small landholders and tenants remain for ever in their old miserable situation. Even if they make enough to keep starvation away from their own family, they cannot take the risk of experimenting, even if they really had any inclination for improving their methods of cultivation. They generally lack the smallest capital which such an improvement would entail. As to the field-labourers, they take no personal interest in their work. They only work because there is no other way of filling their stomach and they are intent to exert themselves as little as possible. Field-labourers have no real interest in improving their methods of field-work because they see no advantage in it for themselves; on the contrary, they warily suspect that their conditions would only become worse.

The task of improving the economic conditions of the farmers and small land-holders rests with the Government. Private exertion and individual ingenuity will have little effect. If the Government would force improvements which have been tested and found practical, and reduce the chances of failure by subsidies and financial help, the Indian farmers would soon enough improve their methods of cultivation. For in spite of much talk to the contrary, the Indian farmers are not so extremely conservative: in the Nimar they took to cotton cultivation readily when they found it profitable. But they must be absolutely sure that the improvements proposed are really practical, and do not entail great expenses.

It is true, Government has everywhere opened experimental and model farms, but they are not popular; first of all, because so far the agricultural experts have failed to win the confidence of the farmers. The latter are not all convinced of the reliableness of such farms: after

all, the managers of these farms are Government servants who receive their salary without regard to the question whether their farm is a paying concern or not. Then, as a rule, the agricultural experts have little contact with the farmers over whom they also lack real authority, they may advise but cannot coerce them.

A more ideal 'model-farmer', to my opinion, would be a man who, furnished with the best knowledge of the methods of cultivation, takes a farm of average size and, with no special help and supervision from Government, gets such excellent results that his fellow farmers feel inclined to follow his example and to adopt his novel ways of cultivation. Even then the Balahi farmer will be one of the last to follow such an example, not because he is so conservative or stubborn, but because he is too careless and slow to perceive what is to his own advantage.

## Chapter XXXIV

### The Future of the Balahis

I have attempted, in these pages, to give a faithful and dispassionate account of the entire range of Balahi life and lore. The reader may perhaps come to the conclusion that the Balahis, as a whole, are after all one of the least attractive groups of the peoples in India. Their racial origin is obscure; what we know for certain is that they are one of the most hybrid castes of India. Their social customs and conventions are not of their own invention, but copied after the pattern of other castes. Their moral laws and the regulations of public life are not based on high moral ideals, but mainly on fear of public opinion and of censure by the caste authorities. The rites and ceremonies which surround and accompany the individual life of the Balahis, its important crises as well as its ordinary course, are each and all imitations of the rich ceremonial of their Hindu environment. Their religious ideas are no less confused, their modes of divine worship no more original, than those of other castes in the Nimar, if we except the rites of worship of the matas and, partly, that of the clan-gods, rites which however are performed only by a small minority of the Balahis and which are quickly falling into oblivion. But it is in the material sphere of culture that the Balahis show their greatest lack of originality. They are not the masters, but the slaves of Nature, poor imitators of the cultivating castes, their serfs and menials. Even in their professional caste occupation, in weaving, they are not very proficient. Their economic conditions are pitiful, their financial distress is severe.

But, not even their social degradation and economic misery are apt to rouse much sympathy and pity, for their unclean habits and improvident and indolent ways of life make one doubt whether they

deserve anything better. Their personal character, too, appeals little to our affection and their fatalistic defeatism cannot stir our admiration. The Balahis are not a charming people, their character is not impeccable, they are not even gifted with special talents and abilities. They are just one of the many untouchable castes of India, and no better nor worse than the rest of them.

However, we must admit that, if the Balahis are what they are to-day: mean, ignorant, fatalistic, dirty, dull, it is not all their own fault. They have been made what they now are by centuries of oppression and serfdom, by living in starvation, squalor, and disease for generations. They are the tragic products of an execrable fate, of a heart-breaking past. And it must be added that they have been held in their shameful plight by all the holy principles of religion and the most sacred laws of society. Their masters have charged them in the name of God and of humanity to remain in their abasement and taught them that it was a sin to attempt deliverance from their degradation, that by all they held sacred they were bound to their chains, forged by the Supreme Law of Karma. The Balahis were the accursed of the gods, they could never escape this curse as long as they lived. Only by patiently bearing their grim lot could they attain salvation in a later re-birth.

What wonder, therefore, that in the course of centuries the Balahis sank lower and lower. Condemned to an inevitable fate, they became fatalists with the motto: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"

All this shows that the problem of the Balahis is the problem of the sixty million untouchables of India. They take their full share of all the religious, social, and economic encumbrances of the so-called Depressed Classes in India. Their problem is verily an All-India problem.

And this problem can be solved only if it is taken in hand on a wide scale, on an All-India basis. There is no sense in trying to "uplift" the untouchables of a particular area only, or to remove only one or the other of the causes of their depravity. The problem of untouchability is a very complex one, and all the foundations under-lying it must be attacked at the same time in an all-out effort if success is to be assured <sup>101</sup>).

<sup>101</sup>) The Harijan Movement inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi may be sincere and well-meant, but it would be unrealistic to believe that such a complex problem as that of the Depressed Classes, having its roots in ancient history and in religion, and involved as it is with much social and economic interests, can be solved at all by mere goodwill and persuasion. There are ideologies behind the problem of untouchability which, in the name of religion and social justice, obstruct any attempt of a solution.

First of all it must be pointed out that the future of the untouchables is inextricably linked with the future of India as a whole. The destiny of the lowest and most backward of India's population groups is the true barometer of India's progress. India as a whole is bound up with the progress or backwardness of every one of her countless peoples. If any caste or tribe in India is diseased, of low morality, illiterate, and poor, it presents a menace to health and good order, and a drag on progress and prosperity for the whole Indian sub-continent. For purely selfish reasons, therefore, it behoves those responsible for the welfare of India to tackle the problem of the Depressed Classes.

It also should be borne in mind that so large a body cannot be maltreated socially and economically without grievously harming the entire progress of the whole country, and without seriously damaging the prestige and good-will which India needs for a respected position in the world. The Indians will meet with a weak response to their demand for a change in the general attitude towards them, unless they begin to put their own house in order. If the Indians demand the place in the world which they ought to occupy on account of their numbers, their ancient civilization, and their great abilities, they should first concede the Depressed Classes a proper place in their midst.

The traditional Hindu religions as well as Hindu society as a whole maintain as a fundamental principle the inequality of men. If this axiom does not fall, if Hindu religion and society do not accept a revision on this point the untouchables are irredeemable as long as they remain within the Hindu fold. As long as this axiom is upheld, the untouchables' hope for salvation lies only in the severance of their connection with Hindu religion and society. If the leaders of this religion and society are unwilling to redeem the "Harijans" from their depravity, they will precipitate their gravitation towards forces which are violently hostile to the traditional Indian culture. India has already come into close contact with the latest and most aggressive forms of Western cultural development, its materialism and industrialism. Western science flooding in with Western education has already destroyed many of the outworn scientific notions of olden days. Materialism in its most insidious and dangerous forms, Socialism and Communism, fiercely attack Indian religion and spirituality, and the steady advance of Industrialisation is irreconcilably and invincibly hostile to the hierarchical system of Indian society and the fundamental principles of Hindu religion, especially the law of Karma. If the leaders of Hindu religion and Hindu society do not rally all their powers for the protection of Indian culture

against these forces, the end of this process will be the complete destruction of a typical Indian culture.

The gravity of the present situation being what it is, it would appear trivial to suggest ways and possibilities for the improvement of this particular group among the untouchables, the Balahis. So many schemes of post-war reconstruction have been thought out and brought forward which, if successful, would result in so many revolutionary changes in all spheres of material and spiritual culture, that the Balahis could not but profit from this planned general improvement of India.

So much is certain: if the Balahis who at present are dirty and full of disease are provided in future with adequate health services they will not only improve in physical health and hygienic habits themselves, but will also do much to conduce to the common good.

So much is certain: if the Balahis who now have little sense of decency and order, are taken from their environment of squalor and starvation, they will regain their civic spirit once the tragic results of centuries of maltreatment and abuse at the hands of their superiors are removed.

So much is certain that the Balahis who at present are so ignorant and backward will improve as soon as education is made general and accessible to all. If at present they apparently want nothing better than what they have, and refuse to make use of their opportunities of improvement, they will soon learn never to be content with less than the best. But first they must be taught that it is no crime to strive for improvement, nor a rebellion against divine ordination to aspire to the highest perfection.

The Balahis who are now so insensible and inaccessible to higher spirituality, once they are freed from the all-absorbing anxiety for the appeasement of their material needs, will aspire to a more elevated spiritual level together with the best peoples of India.

The Balahis who at present are very superstitious and practise the crudest forms of magic and witch-craft in the name of religion, will also learn to know the real causes of natural phenomena. The right appreciation of cause and effect will imperceptibly destroy these lowest forms of superstition and make approach to the sublime truths of religion easy.

The Balahis who are not now proficient in any way of earning their livelihood will, in the future development of Indian agriculture and industry, if provided with equal opportunities, improve also their present inefficiency and acquire that energy and interest which they lack so much at present.

If only a small part of what is promised to the peoples of the world in general, and of India in particular, comes true, the prospects of the Balahis are rosy enough. But whatever part of these promises may be realised, so much is certain that the revolutionary changes which are bound to take place in all spheres of human life as an aftermath of the second world-war, must in some ways benefit a people whose religious, social, and economical position could not be much worse than it is at present.

## Appendix:

Register of Balahi Weavers at Bara-Awar, Khandwa

## Register of Balahi Weavers

Name of weaver	Yarn No. used	Supplier of yarn	Mode of purchase	Interest charged	Type of product	No. of cloths woven per week
1 Janglia 1 worker	6½, 12½ 14½, 16½	Bania	on advance	2 annas per bundle per week	dongra dhoti	6 (in cold season) 3 (i. warm season)
2 Jipria 2 workers	6½	"	"	"	dongra	3 — 6
3 Bhika 3 workers	6½, 12½	"	"	"	dongra dhoti	2 — 8
4 Kanya 2 workers	6½, 12½	"	cash or on loan	"	dongra dhoti	6 — 8
5 Gotu 1 worker	6½, 12½	"	on advance	"	dongra dhoti	2 — 7
6 Naran 2 workers	6½	"	"	"	dongra	4 — 10
7 Bhaulia 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	3 — 6
8 Karu 1 worker	6½, 12½	"	"	"	dongra dhoti	4 — 6
9 Jipru 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	2 — 4
10 Nanu 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	4 — 6
11 Dewa 1 worker	6½, 12½	"	"	"	dongra dhoti	4 — 5
12 Chainia 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	4 — 6
13 Lalchand 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6
14 Ramchand 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6
15 Harchand 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6
16 Mallia 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6
17 Nannia 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6
18 Soaram 3 workers	6½	"	"	"	dongra	18
19 Naran 1 worker	6½, 12½	"	"	"	dongra dhoti	6
20 Saiba 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6
21 Thakur 1 worker	6½, 12½	"	"	"	dongra dhoti	6
22 Sampat 2 workers	6½	"	"	"	dongra	4
23 Bhika 1 worker	6½	"	"	"	dongra	6

at Bara-Awar, Khandwa.

Earnings per week	Work through the year	No. of looms	Sale of cloth	Remarks:
Rs. 3/0	12 months	2	bazaar, to Bania in villages	good worker, anxious for improvement.
1 1/8 to 3/0	12 "	1	bazaar, to Bania in villages	father good weaver, but weak; son unreliable, lazy.
3 3/0 to 4/0	8 "	2	bazaar, to Bania	father old; elder son works part-time; younger son all the time; bad weavers.
4 3/0 to 4/0	8 "	1	" "	father and son good weavers and salesmen.
5 1/0 to 3/0	12 "	1	" "	good weaver, but lazy.
6 2/0 to 5/0	8 "	1	" "	father & son good weavers. do field-work also.
7 2/0 to 3/0	8 "	1	" "	—
8 1/0 to 2/0	8 "	1	" "	bad weaver, unreliable, lazy.
9 2/0 to 3/0	12 "	1	" "	old man, bad weaver, but hard-working.
10 2/8 to 3/8	12 "	1	also in villages, bazaar, to Bania	best weaver, gets highest price for cloth.
11 2/0 to 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
12 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
13 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
14 3/0	4 "	1	" "	works as field-labourer for 8 months.
15 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
16 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
17 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
18 9/0	12 "	3	" "	—
19 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
20 3/0	12 "	1	" "	—
21 3/0	8 "	1	" "	—
22 2/0	8 "	1	" "	—
23 3/0	8 "	1	" "	—

## Glossary

<i>Abir</i>	Faint yellow powder for painting the face of a corpse.
<i>Agwala</i>	The fire-bearer at a funeral.
<i>Ahir</i>	Member of the shepherd caste, a shepherd or milkman.
<i>Akau</i> (or <i>Akhau</i> )	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i> .
<i>Amari</i>	<i>Hibiscus cannabinus</i> , the fibres of which are used for rope-making.
<i>Ana</i>	Ceremony at the beginning of married life.
<i>Angan</i>	Veranda, or more exactly the elevated platform in front of the main entrance into the house.
<i>Angarkha</i>	Old-fashioned coat of unbleached cloth.
<i>Aonla</i>	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> .
<i>Arti</i>	Small brass plate.
<i>Badam</i>	Almond.
<i>Babul</i>	<i>Acacia arabica</i> .
<i>Bakhar</i>	Harrow.
<i>Bania</i>	Member of the Vaishya caste, a merchant, money-lender.
<i>Banjara</i>	Caste of semi-nomadic shepherds and military-camp followers.
<i>Banyan</i>	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> .
<i>Barat</i>	Wedding party.
<i>Barica</i>	A man or woman liable to falling into trance and supposed to be in connection with superhuman powers.
<i>Basor</i>	Member of a caste of basket-makers.
<i>Bhagat</i>	Devotee of a deity.
<i>Bhajan</i>	Song; a hymn in honour of a deity.
<i>Bhakti</i>	Devotion; a religious movement, putting special importance on the spiritual values of religion.
<i>Bhang</i>	A concoction from the leaves of the hemp plant, or taken in the form of a sweet-meat, with intoxicant effect.
<i>Bhat</i>	Genealogist, and registrar of births, marriages and deaths, originally for Rajputs, later also for other castes.
<i>Bhat</i>	A dish of rice.
<i>Bhil</i>	A semi-hinduised tribe of Central India and Rajputana.

<i>Bhilala</i>	A tribe of Central India, of mixed Rajput and Bhil origin.
<i>Bhilaicau</i>	<i>Semecarpus anacardium</i> .
<i>Bhut</i>	A ghost or spirit, generally of malignant character.
<i>Boīra</i>	Cord-spinning reel.
<i>Bigha</i>	1600 square yards of land.
<i>Bija</i>	<i>Pterocarpus marsupium</i> .
<i>Biri</i>	Indian cigarette, rolled in a tobacco-leaf.
<i>Bor</i>	<i>Zyzibus jujuba</i> .
<i>Buddhi</i>	In Indian philosophy the highest status of the human soul previous to dissolution in Brahma; but commonly signifying 'intelligence'.
<i>Chamar</i>	Caste of tanners and leather-workers.
<i>Chana</i> (or <i>channa</i> )	Gram, <i>Cicer arietinum</i> .
<i>Chauk</i>	A magic square in form of a swastika.
<i>Chela</i>	Disciple, follower of a religious teacher.
<i>Chhira</i>	Milk.
<i>Chilam</i> (or <i>chillam</i> )	Earthen pipe.
<i>Chironji</i>	Fruit of <i>Buchanania latifolia</i> .
<i>Choli</i>	Bodice, just covering a woman's breasts.
<i>Chulha</i>	Horse-shoe shaped hearth.
<i>Chuna</i>	Lime; slaked lime mixed in chewing tobacco.
<i>Churel</i>	Spirit of a woman who died during pregnancy, or in child-birth.
<i>Dahi</i>	Curd, sour milk.
<i>Dai</i> (or <i>dayan</i> )	Mid-wife; any old woman.
<i>Dal</i>	Lentils of various kinds.
<i>Daru</i>	Liquor distilled from the flowers of <i>Bassia latifolia</i> ( <i>mahua</i> ).
<i>Datura</i>	<i>Stramonium</i> , used as poison.
<i>Deo</i>	A male deity or spirit; the image of a god.
<i>Dewan</i>	Prime-minister; manager of an estate.
<i>Dhani</i>	The white, pulped and roasted grains of millet ( <i>joari</i> ), a favourite dainty.
<i>Dhanya</i>	Coriander.
<i>Dharmshala</i>	Rest-house, open to any stranger.
<i>Dhela</i>	Copper coin, a palsa, the 64th part of a rupee.
<i>Dhobi</i>	The caste of washer-men.
<i>Dhoti</i>	Loin-cloth.
<i>Dipak</i>	Lamp.
<i>Diwani</i>	Earthen lamp filled with oil or butter, with a cotton wick.
<i>Diya</i>	Lamp formed of clay or dough.
<i>Fermal</i>	Caste of basket-makers.
<i>Gali</i>	Abuse.
<i>Ganja</i>	The agglutinated female flowering tops and their resinous exudations of the hemp plant, an intoxicant. It is smoked.

<i>Garib admi</i>	A poor man; a simpleton.
<i>Ghaghri</i>	Red petticoat.
<i>Ghara</i>	Earthen water-pot.
<i>Ghat</i>	A dish of wheat and gram boiled together.
<i>Ghi</i>	Clarified butter.
<i>Ghungru</i>	Anklet with little bells, used in dancing.
<i>Gobar</i>	Cattle dung.
<i>Gokhru</i>	<i>Tribulus lenuginosus</i> .
<i>Got (or gotra)</i>	Clan, sept.
<i>Gujar</i>	A high agricultural caste of Central India, but originally nomadic cattle-herdsmen.
<i>Gulal</i>	Bright red powder.
<i>Gular</i>	Fig tree, <i>Ficus glomerata</i> .
<i>Gur</i>	Unrefined sugar.
<i>Guru</i>	Religious teacher, spiritual guide.
<i>Haldi</i>	Turmeric.
<i>Handi</i>	Cooking pot, of iron or burned clay.
<i>Hath</i>	Cubit, measured from the finger-tips to the elbow.
<i>Haiyar</i>	Murderer, or generally a man out of caste.
<i>Hela</i>	Male buffalo.
<i>Haichi</i>	Cardamon.
<i>Imli</i>	Tamarind tree.
<i>Isai</i>	Indian Christian.
<i>Jaggery</i>	<i>Gur</i> , coarse, unrefined sugar.
<i>Jagir</i>	Tract of land, owned and administered by a petty chief, a <i>jaṭrdar</i> .
<i>Jam</i>	Guava, <i>Paidium guyava</i> .
<i>Jamun</i>	Blackberry, <i>Eugenia tambulana</i> .
<i>Jal</i>	Caste, sometimes: clan.
<i>Jat-potel</i>	Caste head-man.
<i>Jau</i>	Barley.
<i>Jhanjh</i>	Cymbals.
<i>Jhutha</i>	The leavings after public dinners.
<i>Joari</i>	Millet, <i>Andropogon sorghum</i> .
<i>Kajal</i>	Lamp-black, used as a cosmetic.
<i>Kala</i>	Threshing floor.
<i>Kapur</i>	Camphor.
<i>Karma</i>	Belief of Hindus in retribution for good or evil deeds in a later life.
<i>Khana</i>	Meal, banquet, dinner.
<i>Kharik</i>	Date.
<i>Khas (or khans)</i>	<i>Andropogon muricatus</i> , a harmful weed.
<i>Khat</i>	Small string-bed.
<i>Khir</i>	Rice, boiled in milk and sugar, but without salt.
<i>Kolpa</i>	Weeding plough.
<i>Kopra</i>	Cocconut.
<i>Kothi</i>	Grain bin.
<i>Kotkar (or kotwal)</i>	Village watchman.

<i>Kuku</i>	Dark red powder, contained in the fruit of <i>Mallo-</i> <i>tus philippinensis</i> .
<i>Kul</i>	Family.
<i>Kumar</i>	Caste of potters.
<i>Kutumb</i>	Relationship.
<i>Laddu</i>	Wheat cakes baked in butter.
<i>Laung</i> (or <i>loung</i> )	Cloves, used in worship.
<i>Lota</i>	Pear-shaped, small brass pot.
<i>Lugra</i>	Main garment of a Balahi woman.
<i>Mahua</i>	<i>Bassia latifolia</i> Roxb.
<i>Malguzari</i>	Privately owned land.
<i>Mandap</i>	Hut of the watchman in a field, a wedding booth.
<i>Mandir</i>	Temple, shrine of a god.
<i>Mang</i>	Caste of basket-makers and field-servants.
<i>Mango</i>	<i>Mangifera indica</i> .
<i>Mantra</i>	Magic formula.
<i>Mata</i>	Female deity or spirit; a female magician.
<i>Mehtar</i>	Prince; title of <i>jat-patel</i> ; term used for members of the sweeper caste.
<i>Mar-ghat</i>	Burial ground, graveyard.
<i>Misri</i>	Black powder, used as tooth-paste.
<i>Mundi</i>	Finger ring.
<i>Murti</i>	Brass or stone figure of a deity.
<i>Nai</i>	Barber; master of ceremonies.
<i>Nara</i>	Sacred red or white thread, used in magic.
<i>Nath</i>	Nose-ring.
<i>Nim</i>	<i>Melia azadirachta</i> .
<i>Orhni</i>	Scarf.
<i>Pagri</i>	Turban.
<i>Paisa</i>	Copper coin, 64th part of a rupee, 4th part of an anna.
<i>Palang</i>	Large bed.
<i>Panch</i> (or <i>panchayat</i> )	Council of five; generally caste or village council.
<i>Papaya</i>	<i>Carica papaya</i> .
<i>Pargana</i>	Tract of land in the native states of Central India, equivalent to a district in the provinces.
<i>Patel</i>	Village head-man.
<i>Pirana</i>	Goat for driving bullocks.
<i>Pichhori</i>	Large cotton sheet.
<i>Pipal</i>	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> .
<i>Prat</i>	Brass plate.
<i>Puja</i>	Sacrifice, religious worship.
<i>Puri</i>	Wheat cakes, roasted in butter.
<i>Purohit</i>	Priest; man acting at a sacrifice.
<i>Raja</i>	King; prince.
<i>Rakshas</i>	Demon.

<i>Rupce</i>	Silver coin; 16 annas make a rupee; 4 paisas an anna; 3 pais a paisa.
<i>Ryotwari</i>	Government owned land.
<i>Sabbal</i>	Crow-bar.
<i>Sadhu</i>	Religious mendicant, spiritual teacher.
<i>Sahukar</i>	Money-lender.
<i>Sala</i>	Wife's brother.
<i>Salai</i>	<i>Boswellia serrata</i> .
<i>Sari</i>	Scarf, worn like a <i>lagra</i> .
<i>Sarni</i>	Purification ceremony, for re-admittance into the caste.
<i>Seer</i>	1.76 English pints; 4 <i>seers</i> make a <i>chauki</i> ; 16 <i>chaukis</i> a <i>maund</i> ; 12 <i>maunds</i> a <i>mani</i> .
<i>Semal</i>	Silk-cotton tree, <i>Bombax malabaricum</i> .
<i>Sendhur</i>	Vermillion.
<i>Shisham</i>	<i>Dalbergia latifolia</i> .
<i>Sing</i>	Wind instrument, similar to a French horn.
<i>Sirapuri</i>	Wheat bread, broken into crumbs and baked in butter or oil.
<i>Suji</i>	Wheat which is prepared by moistening the grain and grinding it in a stone pricked with minute holes.
<i>Supari</i>	Areca nut.
<i>Supra</i>	Winnowing fan.
<i>Sut</i>	String, thread; <i>kachchha sut</i> is a string that has never before been used for any other purpose and may therefore be employed in a magic performance.
<i>Tahsil</i>	A sub-district.
<i>Tahsildar</i>	Revenue officer, in charge of a <i>tahsil</i> .
<i>Tappa</i>	Estate.
<i>Teli</i>	Caste of oil-pressers.
<i>Temru</i>	<i>Diospyros melanoxylon</i> .
<i>Tendu</i>	<i>Diospyros tomentosa</i> .
<i>Thalli</i>	Big brass plate.
<i>Thuar</i> (or <i>thuhar</i> , <i>thucar</i> )	<i>Euphorbia nerifolia</i> .
<i>Tika</i> (or <i>tikli</i> )	Starlike ornament worn between the eye-brows; a sect-mark.
<i>Til</i> (or <i>tilli</i> )	Sesame, <i>Sesamum indicum</i> .
<i>Tiwaz</i>	<i>Ougenia dalbergoides</i> .
<i>Topi</i>	Cap.
<i>Tulsi</i>	Basil tree, <i>Ozymum sanctum</i> .
<i>Tur</i> (or <i>tuar</i> )	<i>Cajanus indicus</i> .
<i>Urad</i>	A pulse, <i>Phaseolus radiatus</i> .
<i>Watan</i>	The permanent right to render a certain service (for instance: guarding the village) and to enjoy the emoluments attached to this service.
<i>Zamindari</i>	Ownership of a tract of land, with the right to lease it out to tenants.

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Photo by James Lercher S. V. D.

Fig. 1. Mandhata (p. 293).

PLATE II



Fig. 2.  
Gopal Dhaksya, my main  
informant.



Fig. 3.  
A young Balahi woman.



Fig. 4. An old Balahi woman.



Fig. 5.  
A village lane (p. 343).



Fig. 6.  
A field watchman's hut (p. 385).

Balahi Types (see pp. 9—12).



Fig. 7—8. Natu Saurya.



Fig. 9—10. Mangia of Karpur.

PLATE IV



*Above:* Fig. 11. The Balahi bhat  
at a song recital (p. 75).

*Aside:* Fig. 12. The Balahi bhat  
with his clan-register (p. 75).



Fig. 13. The Balahi barber at work (p. 78).



Fig. 14.  
A Balahi woman's ear-rings  
and neck ornaments (p. 340).



Fig. 15.  
A Balahi woman's ankle-rings  
(p. 340).

PLATE VI



Fig. 16. The Balahi sadhu at prayer (p. 76).



Fig. 17.  
Balahi musicians, with *mirding* and  
*ghanj* (p. 86).



Fig. 18.  
A Balahi, blowing the *sing* (p. 85).



Fig. 19. A village school (p. 121).



Fig. 20. Balahi boys at play  
(p. 122).

*Aside:*

Fig. 21. A Balahi girl (p. 115).





Fig. 22. The *chorwana* ceremony (p. 139).



Fig. 23. Bridegroom with the *kanthar* (p. 138).



*Aside:*

Fig. 24. The bride, riding on the hip of the barber (p. 144).

*Below:*

Fig. 25. The bridegroom, on his face the bridal crown (p. 144).

*Below:*

Fig. 26. The bride, adorned with the bridal crown (p. 144).





Fig. 27. The wedding banquet (p. 146).



Fig. 28.



Fig. 29.

Fig. 28—29. Guests at the wedding (p. 146).

PLATE X



Fig. 30.  
The Balahi sadhu (p. 216).



Fig. 31.  
The Balahi brahman's performance  
at the river (p. 210).



Fig. 32. At the conclusion of the Balahi brahman's performance (p. 213).



Fig. 33. A Balahi at worship (p. 223).



Fig. 34. A Balahi sadhu, whispering into the ear of a boy on Janmashtami (p. 319).

PLATE XII



Fig. 35. *A lugam* (p. 232).



Fig. 36. *Akadhi* (p. 311).



Fig. 37. *Toladan* (p. 288).



Fig. 38. Balahis at worship at the shrine of Sitala Mata (p. 276).



Fig. 39.  
The Bhagats of the Kati Mata  
(p. 261).



Fig. 40.  
The Kati Mata (p. 260).



Photo by Francis Lammersdorf S. V. D.

Fig. 41. The Ganagaur festival (p. 302).



Fig. 42.

Nag Panchmi (p. 314),



Fig. 43.

The shrine of Hanuman (p. 233).



Photo by Francis Lammerdorf S. V. D.

Fig. 44. The figures of Parvati and her divine spouse (p. 303).



Fig. 45.  
A chank (p. 109).



Fig. 46.  
Shrine of Mahadeo near Barhanpur  
(p. 294).



Photo by Francis Lammersdorf S. V. D.

Fig. 47. The Pola festival (p. 316).



Fig. 48.

A light travelling cart (p. 386).



Fig. 49.

Putting the tyre on the wheel  
(p. 387).



Photo by Francis Lammersdorf S. V. D.

Fig. 50.

Getting ready for the barwa's procession on Bhawani Nawrata (p. 322).

PLATE XVIII



Fig. 51. Churning butter (p. 356).



Fig. 52. Grinding spices (p. 357).



Fig. 53. Baking bread (p. 354).



Fig. 54. Threshing (p. 390).



Fig. 55.  
Grain-bin of clay (p. 349).



Fig. 56.  
Bamboo-plaited grain-bin (p. 350).

PLATE XX



Fig. 57. Winnowing (p. 339).



Fig. 58.  
Balahi woman with grain-pestle  
(p. 351).



Fig. 59.  
Balahi woman with winnowing  
fan (p. 350).



Fig. 60. House of a wealthy Baluchi (p. 344).



Fig. 61.  
Winding the yarn for  
the warp (p. 424).

PLATE XXII



*Above:* Fig. 62. Arranging the warp (p. 425).

*Aside:* Fig. 63. Winding the yarn for warp and weft (p. 424).

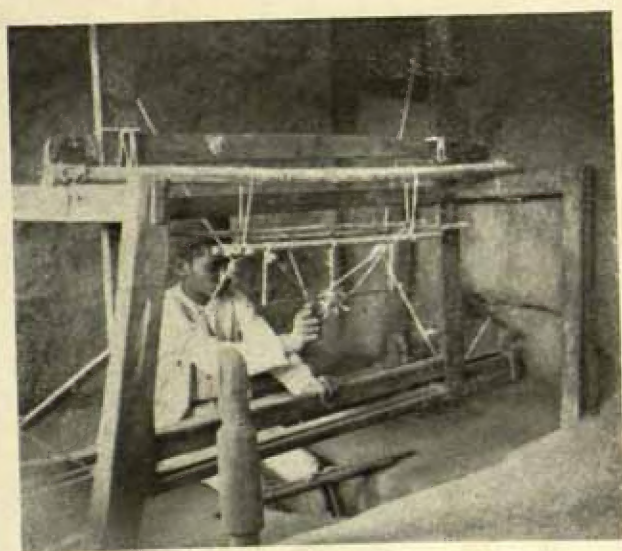


Fig. 64. The Balahi weaver at his loom (p. 426).





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